

Time Management in Youth & Family Ministry

Inherent in Youth & Family Ministry is a conflict between two compelling expectations. As a professional, the Youth & Family Minister is expected to keep normal office hours during the business day. This allows the professional to answer phone calls and emails, do office work and be available for meetings all during the normal business hours kept by parents and adults, like youth ministry committee members. Being absent from the office or worse yet, unavailable during the normal work day, can give the impression that the Youth & Family Minister is not working all their hours. On the other hand, most Youth & Family Ministry is done afterschool and on the weekends when children and youth are available. Confirmation is normally held on Wednesday evenings, Bible studies are often held very early in the mornings or late in the evenings and youth events and family events are normally held on the weekends. Some youth and even families also have an expectation that they should be able to email, text, phone the youth worker at anytime for small matters like schedule questions and large managers like a family crisis. If many people expect the youth worker to be at work on weekdays 9:00am – 5:00pm and many other people expect the youth worker to work 3:30pm – 9:00pm and on the weekend and be eternally “on call” then there are three options: 1) to frustrate many people; 2) to work without ceasing creating, exhaustion, resentment and eventual burn out or 3) to communicate.

Communication

The fundamental solution to the Youth & Family Ministry time management issue is to communicate with the pastor, the church secretary and members the hours you are actually working. If you think of the average day as having three parts: morning, afternoon, and evening a reasonable expectation would be that a person would work two of the three on a typical day. So, if the afternoon is going to be spent preparing for confirmation and the evening spent teaching confirmation, and meeting with youth then the morning should be kept free. However, if your schedule is a mystery to the church staff they will become frustrated with you. Some simple steps to better communication include:

- 1) Meet with your supervisor weekly, if only for a few moments, to discuss your work schedule for that week.

- 2) Communicate frequently and clearly with the receptionist when you can be expected to be in the office and available to return calls. Also, establish your expectations about people being invited to contact you when you are not at the church. Communication also includes letting all the congregation members know what's going on. Make sure schedule of events, i.e. what the youth person is doing, are included in the bulletins and newsletters. If people know what they are doing, they are more understanding of schedules

- 3) Each and every week post a simple schedule on your office door and/or in the youth room (see examples below). While you are at it, also post a copy of your job description outside your office door to show the number of hours you are contracted for and what your specific responsibilities are. This may help prevent many misunderstandings.

Week #1

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
AM	Worship	Day Off	Office	Home	Office	Home	Home
PM	Home	Day Off	Lunch at School	Office (prep time)	Office	Office	Family Min event
EVE	Luther League	Day Off	Home	Confirmation	Home	At High School event	Family Min event

Week #2

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
AM	Worship	Day Off	Office	Home	Office	Home	Middle School Overnight
PM	Home	Day Off	Office	Office (prep time)	Office	Prepare Overnight	Sleep
EVE	Luther League	Day Off	Home	Confirmation	Home	Middle School Overnight	Sleep

Parents/Volunteers/Committee Members/Youth

Any parent will tell you that it is easier to tie a child's laces than to teach a child to tie. However, in the long run, this strategy means adults will spend too much of their day tying shoes and at some point a 15 year old will be embarrassed having her mother come to lace her sneakers before gym class. In the same way, it can appear easier to simply make all the plans, do all the telephoning, purchase the supplies, send the emails, design the posters, write the newsletter article and sit back and complain about how the congregation doesn't take any ownership in the Youth & Family Ministry. Another option would be to try this discipline: create a list of all the tasks related to an event. Highlight the tasks which are best performed by the staff person, like preparing the Bible study. Then mark the tasks best performed by a youth, like designing a poster, sending reminder texts or taking pictures. Then mark the tasks best performed by other congregation members, like arranging for drivers or fetching supplies. Recruiting, encouraging, and thanking volunteers may seem like more work for today but in the long run the benefits include empowering leaders, garnering support for the ministry, and give you more time for direct ministry with families and youth.

Technology: A Saint and Sinner

Life in the twenty-first century sometimes seems to include a presumption of total access. We both expect to be able to access people and information 24/7 and others expect to be able to access us at will. It has been suggested that this is primarily the fault of technology. I think that is the fault of a lack of either the technical competence or the restraint in the use the technology to create breathing space in our lives. First, just because the cell phone rings does not mean you have to answer it – this is what voicemail was invented for. The same is true of text (SMS) messages and all other types of instant communication. Create the expectation among your contacts that you will respond to communications during your working hours. Second, give your contacts alternate ways to get the information they need. Keep an up to date web page or group page on Facebook so people will not need to call you. Also, keep the church secretary aware of all details so callers can be assisted by the receptionist. It is also appropriate to include the details of the next event in your voicemail so a caller can get what they need without disturbing your time at rest.

*Pastor Mark A. Anderson, Assistant to the Bishop, Northeastern Iowa Synod, ELCA
with help from Adrian Walter*