

BRUCE DEATON

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SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES

DESCRIPTION AND REQUIREMENTS

Small group activities are an integral part of all retreat days and are a part of some conferences or rally's. They are generally youth led, unless there is a need to use adult leaders.

Small group leaders:

The youth leaders can come from peer ministry programs, be appointed, volunteer just for the day, be seniors working on the freshman retreat, etc. At conferences, youth leaders can come from the councils, core team; or we use youth ministers and adult volunteers. At schools, teachers can form their own small groups and make a retreat day themselves.

Size:

Optimal size for the small group is 6-8 people, including the leader or facilitator. This group is then often put together with 2 other small groups to form a class unit of 18 to 24 people. Sometimes we don't need to regroup, and we maintain the small group throughout the day.

Small group activities include:

- **Opening, Ice breaking Activities: Interview**
Youth begin work in pairs (2's). They interview another person, and that person interviews them. After working in 2's, the small group reconvenes and the pairs introduce each other to the rest of the small group. This process of working in pairs, followed by working in the small group will continue the rest of the day.

Sometimes activities require the youth to work individually, alone, before the group can begin to process the issue or questions. For example:

- **Seeds of Change**
Youth answer questions about themselves, then if time allows, work in pairs, followed by work in small group. If time is short, we go to work in small groups.

There are many activities that are active, movement oriented.

- **Double mask-making**
Working alone, the youth create masks that reflect their outer and inner selves. Materials that can be used include paper mache, plaster, paper plates, etc. Given enough time, this can be shared with their partner, and then used in a ritual with the rest of the small group.
- **Liturgy preparation**
Each small group can pick a part or segment of the liturgy or prayer service that they would like to develop. I include a liturgy preparation kit for each retreat and

conference. The kit provides a framework for the development of active participation of small groups, but is not limited to the suggestions. New ideas are always encouraged and welcomed.

Large group open forum

At some point in the day, I like to meet as a large group, all small groups combined, to hear and process the issues of the day. This is always the most exciting part of the day because the youth take total ownership of this activity. They speak to one another, and respond to one another. This can be very joyful, and fun; but it can also be painful. This is where I really let the Holy Spirit come in and guide us.

Requirements:

- **Name tags** for each participant. Included in the tag is the name, small group number and/or letter, and any other information you will need to have on the tag. The tags must be handed out and put on before the youth enters the retreat or rally space.

Small group number or letter. There are many different systems you can use, it depends on the size of your group. It is easy to divide a large class (250+) by number, and then subdivide by letter. In other words, go down the alphabetical list and put down the number or letter of a group: Albert-1, Beck-2, Cooper-3, etc. All 1's would be a small group, all 2's, all 3's, etc. This keeps it random and organized. If we need to have class size groups, we would have eighteen 1's, eighteen 2's, etc. Then subdivide those class size groups into 1A, 1B, 1C; with 6-8 youth in each sub group. **Note:** It is crucial that this grouping is done early. You can identify your group leaders and assign them according to their strengths. There is no need to assign partners. There is often one or two youth who are absent, and then the partner has a problem.

Space: I like to use a gym that is large enough to hold the entire group. I have each small group meet in a place, on the floor, to begin our work. After we have established the small group process, we can be flexible and use other rooms. **Note: It is very important that we have the entire group together in one space for the first small group activity.** This opening activity sets the tone for day, and lets me see exactly where we stand with regards to small group dynamics. If we are spread out through a facility, I have to run from room to room to make sure things are starting correctly.

Supervision: This model of small group work is very easy on adult supervision. Other than a main contact person, I am usually able to monitor and lead all of the activities. This can be a blessing or a curse. If there is difficulty in finding adults who are good at facilitating small groups, we have solved the problem. If there are adults who do like to facilitate, we can incorporate them into the leaders group or they can make their own small group. I have seen it succeed all ways. If these activities are at a rally or conference, usually a lot of the small group leaders are adults.

Preparation: You will want to allow some time to meet and prepare the small group leaders for their task. Go through some of the activities, ask questions, play and pray. This will allow you to hone their skills and identify strength and weaknesses.

Materials: Every small group will need a shopping bag with it's number or letter on it. In the bag put all of the small group activity materials including pencils for each youth, question sheets, interviews, a Bible, liturgy preparation materials, poster paper, markers, glue, scissors, etc.

Meeting: We will need a meeting with me and the small group leaders before the day starts, either the morning of the retreat or rally, or the night before. This allows us to process any issues current in the school or diocese and hand out all of the materials and review them.

One question I will ask is how we hand out name-tags, take attendance, etc.

I know that there is a lot of information here. Please ask me any questions you have, or let me know if there is a space problem, or any other kind of problem, you might foresee.

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