

Fall: Ramping Up to Slow Down

By: Amy Jacober – Lead Consultant with Ministry Architects

www.ministryarchitects.com

Summer is over, the back-to-school-bash is in your rear view window, and now you can relax. Are you laughing out loud yet?

Fall is that magical time with the change of leaves, a crispness in the air, and a flurry of activity. It is the time when activities ramp up! School is back in full swing, sports are taking over, dance, and scouting, and band, and, and, and! For everyone there seems to be a hundred other things filling every moment for the teens you know. So what is a youth pastor to do?

You can make yourself crazy trying to program and schedule in between everything else. That is common. Or, you could intentionally plan for down time. Down time does not necessarily mean doing nothing. Down time creates space for memories, for rest, and for laughter. Most importantly, down time creates space for the Holy Spirit to be at work in the lives of your teens and yourself.

Below is a list of 50 choices. You read that right, choices! DO NOT attempt to do all of these. Do not even attempt to do most of these. Read through the list, let it spark your imagination. Some options are focused on faith formation, some are simply silly fun. Notice where some are separate activities needing modest planning, others are options you can add on to an already existing youth group time. The point is to let go of the need to do everything over the top and relax into the possibility of being active without being worn out. Read, pray, suggest, and make choices for how to create a memorable fall without making you or your other leaders crazy.

1. **Cook an entire meal over an open campfire.** This can even be a great activity where each small group has a different part of the meal to cook!
2. **Go apple picking.** Find the dates and times for the closest orchard and plan the trip!
3. **Plan a group bike ride** be certain everyone brings a water and choose a trail that will be enjoyable for your entire group.
4. **S'mores**
5. **Pray for the persecuted church** idop.org has a lot of information on the persecuted church and suggestions on how to join for a day of prayer.
6. **Plant bulb flowers in anticipation of spring** Check out this website for tips and information. <http://www.sunset.com/garden/flowers-plants/bulbs-to-plant-in-fall>
7. **Take a full moon walk** Look up the best night at moongiant.com
8. **Play a friendly game of softball**
9. **Decorate a community center or nursing home for fall**
10. **Have an after church pot luck picnic**

11. **Teach a spiritual discipline and invite students to practice it all fall.** There are many sites and books, which discuss spiritual disciplines. Here is one that offers a clear list with explanations. <http://christianteens.about.com/od/christianliving/a/What-Are-Spiritual-Disciplines.htm>
12. **Host a game night.**
13. **Go camping with your small group.** As much fun as an all youth group camping trip can be, there is something amazing about the shared experience with a small group of people. This can also eliminate the stress that comes with organizing something large.
14. **Take the entire youth group to a corn maze**
15. **Set up prayer stations one night for youth group** This is another category where there are many options for looking up ideas on the web. Here is one place to begin <http://www.rethinkingyouthministry.com/2009/07/creative-prayer-stations-for-church.html>
16. **Build a stone altar of gratitude.** Each student chooses a small stone, writes in permanent marker at least one thing for which they are grateful and pile the stones together. Thank God for all mentioned.
17. **Take class pictures for each class in your youth group.** You can either create a backdrop yourself or invite each class to come up with the best class picture possible. This might include a great activity (i.e. everyone rock climbing) or dress up (i.e. the entire class dressed in old time western wear.)
18. **Hold a prayer vigil.** This will most likely appeal to more committed teens and leaders. Choose a night of prayer, even 4 hours is great! Guide them to transition every 20 minutes i.e. Pray for your neighbor, pray for our church, pray for the struggles in the world, pray for children in need, pray for our country, pray for your teachers, pray for crop harvests, ask God to help you see blessings in your life, thank God for all you have, pray for those who are sick in your church and community, pray for someone you don't really like, pray for God to be known by everyone, praise God for who God is!
19. **Offer an afternoon/evening of free babysitting.**
20. **Form a fall book club.**
21. **Organize a youth group cookbook as a gift for parents.** I know, I know...this can be like a black hole or...make it really fun. The cookbook doesn't have to be professional. Ask each teen to bring in a favorite recipe and why they like it so much. Is it the actual flavor or are there family memories? The stories are priceless! Type the recipes and stories up. Ask each contributor to sign his or her recipe, and your cookbook is complete. If you have someone artistic ask that person to create the cover. Print and bind the cookbooks in the most affordable way for your group. Invite each teen to keep this a secret and offer the cookbook as a present for Christmas!
22. **Plan random acts of kindness for staff** Find out one small thing each staff person enjoys and make it happen. This can be a cup of coffee waiting at their desk to washing their car while they are in a meeting.

23. **Volunteer at the Ronald McDonald House or some other organization BEFORE the holidays arrive.** Many people want to volunteer at the holidays. Offer before the rush to bless those in need.
24. **Attend an outdoor concert.**
25. **Go to a farmer's market with your small group.**
26. **Hold a clothes and shoe drive for a local shelter.** Winter is coming and long before the crisis hits, shelters appreciate the extra help.
27. **Study several saints.** Different traditions honor different saints. Look up the stories of a few saints to share the stories of those who have gone before us.
28. **Have a saint dress up day.** After you have studied several saints, invite your students to choose a saint and come one night dressed up as that saint ready to share his or her story.
29. **Take a nature hike scavenger hunt.** Even if you have students who don't love hiking, a scavenger hunt makes for a fun time. Depending on where you live, you may make your scavenger hunt out of natural items or you may need to hide a few items along the trail.
30. **Plan a bonfire with campfire songs reminiscent from summer camp.**
31. **Attend a football/soccer/field hockey or volleyball game.**
32. **Make hot apple cider for youth group one night.** There is nothing so fragrant and iconic of fall as a big pot of apple cider. Toss in a few cinnamon sticks and cloves and everyone is in a good mood.
33. **Host a movie night in a backyard.** Make the screen either on the side of a house or string up a sheet. Invite each person to bring a blanket or lawn chair, crank up the sound, pop the corn and enjoy your own outdoor theatre.
34. **Have students write handwritten thank you notes to parents or caregivers.** Many teens will need help with what to write for this activity. Parents and caregivers do so much for their children and it often goes unnoticed. When it is not mother's day or father's day, this small note of gratitude can be just the blessing they need!
35. **Collect blankets long before they are needed for shelters and people in need in your area.** Blankets, throws, and sleeping bags seem to gather in the corners of garages. Ask everyone to look through what they have and see if there is at least one they may be able to share. This is a great time for the conversation of having more than we need when others don't have any.
36. **Play a kickball game.**
37. **Go on a prayer walk.** This is a wonderful time to walk the neighborhood where your church is located. Go in groups of 3-4 and pray for the people living there, businesses, schools, and whatever you come across. This is a wonderful way for your church to connect with their area.
38. **Have secret buddies for the fall.** Instead of the tradition of a secret Santa based around small gifts in December, partner those in the youth group with secret buddies to pray for one another, find ways to encourage, or bless each other all in secret. The first Sunday of advent is a great time to reveal as you talk about the one who is coming who will intercede and bless more than we can imagine.
39. **Rake leaves for someone in need.**

40. **Host a spoons tournament, complete with giant spoon trophy!** Spoons is classic card game meets musical chairs. It's silly, fast paced fun. Feel free to get your creative types to make the most over the top spoon themed trophy possible! If you've never played, here are the rules: <http://boardgames.about.com/od/cardgames/a/spoons.htm>
41. **Pass out hot chocolate somewhere in your town on a cold day.** This is a wonderful activity to hold at a gas station or other public space. It's a wonderful experience to see the faces of people as you are giving them something nice, for free with no agenda. The conversations after are priceless.
42. **Offer to do or make any preparations needed for advent for your church.** Some churches offer activities or crafts, devotions or need decorating. Talk with your staff to see if there is any way you may make their lives a little easier as the busyness of the season ramps up.
43. **Choose a Bible verse and memorize it as a group over the course of the season.** Think through where you are as a group. What are you studying? What verse do you think your students need to know individually and as a group?
44. **Invite students to the 29 days of gratitude challenge for the month of November.** It's one thing to name something for which you are grateful at Thanksgiving dinner. It's a whole other experience to choose gratitude all month long. Invite your students to join you as you seek to name one thing for every day of the month of November. Choose how you want to share these blessings; text, Facebook page, e-mail chain or written lists as you meet weekly. You choose!
45. **Light a peace lamp.** It is no secret that our world is violent and struggling. Light an oil lamp and remind students to remember that Jesus is the light of the world. As He is the Prince of Peace, we too are called to be active peacemakers. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." Matthew 5:9. Invite students to pray for peace around the world as well as to be agents of peacemaking in their own homes and schools. Be certain the lamp is lit every time you meet this season as a tangible reminder of the need for peace.
46. **Have a caramel apple bar one night.** Sticky, messy, and totally memorable! Enjoy an old fashioned caramel apple with a twist as you set up this soon to be favorite. <http://spoonful.com/recipes/how-setup-caramel-apple-bar>
47. **Go on a sidewalk chalk-blessing mission.** At some point, all leaders expect toilet paper to be dangling from a tree in their yard. This activity includes the same thrill of sneakiness with the added bonus of blessing others and easy clean up! Go armed with sidewalk chalk, a few phrases and verses to bless others and have a great time! This is best done either later in the evening or early in the morning.
48. **Host a cranberry bowl tournament the day after Thanksgiving.** Choose your sport of choice for your students. Flag football is a great one if you have a group large enough for several teams. Regardless of the choice, hype it up and get out to play. This is a wonderful option for those who don't like to

shop or a way to encourage the conversation of the season NOT being about getting more things.

49. **Fill a blessing jar.** Invite students to fill a blessing jar over the course of the fall. This is as simple as finding a large, clear container and setting small pieces of paper and a few markers beside it. Every week, ask your students to write down ways in which they were blessed. See if you can fill the jar together by the time advent arrives.
50. **Make fleece tie blankets.** The easiest homemade blanket ever! Even for the most craft challenged, this one is possible. Choose for whom you would like to make the blankets and ask for donations of fleece fabric. These are great lap blankets for those who are older, baby blankets, or to be sent to a mission overseas. Here are the super simple instructions, <http://www.instructables.com/id/How-to-Make-a-Tied-Fleece-Blanket/>

So there you have it. Fifty choices for you and your youth group this Fall. Again, don't try to do them all. Allow yourself to use these ideas to create memories and relationships with the goal of faith formation to be taking place.

Have a great Fall!