

Giving Your Group a Label that works

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Published by *Youthworker Journal* March/April 2010.

Your group needs a name. Face it, you can't call it *"that-thing-which-meets-on-Sunday-afternoon-at-five-o'clock-for-all-those-young-people-who-are-in-high-school-and-are-attached-to-this-church"* for very long (I guess you can shorten it to ttwmosaafatypwaihssaatc but that is really hard to pronounce). For obvious reasons you need some sort of tag or handle that helps give the group an identity and something to refer to when you are speaking about it.

While some groups just refer to themselves as 'youth' or 'youth group' (which is fine by me), others try to be clever or trendy. This is where many groups stumble. The first problem is when we try and chose a name that we think will give our group an identity that it really shouldn't have. In our desire to be attractive to the world, we go for names that reflect the spirit of this age rather than the things of Christ. There are numerous groups with silly names such as: Rampage, Rage, Bomb Squad, the Mob etc. Spend a moment and look up the dictionary definitions of these words. Or, see if these words occur in the Bible. You'll find that none of these words carries with it a positive connotation. The rationale given to use these names is that the group is 'trying to be attractive to today's youth' or, 'this was the names the kids came up with'. However, these names rarely indicate what we are trying to be. Quite often, they indicate the opposite. Please be clear on this; we must be actively promoting an alternative to the things of this world at every turn, even in the names of our groups.

The second mistake many of us make is when we give our groups names that are just simply inappropriate. These are names that are slightly off centered and should be better left alone. More often than not, these groups are acronyms which may look good at first, but upon closer examination are found wanting. Examples of these are names such as (and these are real examples) 'Youth Under Christ' or... 'Y.U.K'. good try, disastrous outcome. How can you name a group that is trying to reflect Jesus, 'yuck'. Or, there is Sunday Night Youth Fellowship (S.N.Y.F.) To sniff is not really an attractive thing. I've met some people who have a problem with sniffing, it has never occurred to me to name my fellowship group after them. And, all things considered, I draw the line at naming my group after most bodily functions! There are even worse examples of youth group names but I'll stop here.

Please realize that there is nothing wrong with clever names. We need to be careful however, that the names of our groups promote our cause and don't work against us. Any name that is even the slightest bit suspect should be rejected. A little while back, there was an occurrence of churches with the name of St. Paul's or St. Peter's calling their youth groups S.P.E.W. (This stands for St. Paul's Evening Worship or something similar). I would advise these churches to do a word study on what the Bible says about the word 'spew' and then have a rethink. (If you need help see Psalm 59:7; Jeremiah 51:44; and Revelation 3:16 and see what the Lord says about spew.) I would suggest that

it is unwise (and unhelpful) to give your group a name built on something that Jesus detests. Furthermore, would a newcomer really be attracted by a group called 'spew'?

How to give your group a name

The rule is simple. Give your group a name that reflects who you are and/or what you do. You can either chose a generic term such as "Youth Group" (!). Or, you can go for something which is Christian, and catchy. There are groups with names such as Alpha, Reality, Axis, U-turn, Exalt, and G.2.C. (Glory to Christ). Choose a name that is simple and conveys what you are trying to do.

I'll let you in on a little secret - in some ways, the name of the group is quite irrelevant. The local young people won't come to a group with even the best of names if the program doesn't take them anywhere and the people are mean. Work on developing a program that helps young people to walk closely with Christ and go for a name that is simple, positive, and Christian.