

Young Life and the Church: *Building a Positive Working Relationship*

The founder of Young Life, Jim Rayburn, had a passion for kids hearing the Gospel of Christ and having an opportunity to grow in their faith. A necessary step in the ongoing Christian development of a student is for them to become an active member of a local church.

The purpose of this packet is to help local Young Life areas develop positive working relationships with local churches and pastors. Listed below are the materials contained in this packet which can help you to begin, maintain or enhance these relationships.

Background Materials (left side of the folder)

- A Brief History of Young Life and the Local Church
- “What is Young Life?” for churches*
- Frequently Asked Questions About Young Life and the local church*
- Case Studies in Building Church Relationships
- Advantages of Building Church Relationships

*These resources are printed versions of pages from one of our websites. You can find additional information by searching “church” at www.younglife.org or staff.younglife.org.

Information to Utilize in Meeting with Pastors (right side of the folder)

- Pastor meeting or luncheon agendas
- Materials to share with the pastors
 - Information on ordering *In the World of Kids* DVD
 - Young Life Overview Brochure
 - Young Life Statement of Faith Brochure
- Fundraising with churches

Sample Agenda: Pastor Meeting

You'll need 15 minutes. Call the church office for an appointment.

1. Introduce yourself and explain your capacity in Young Life, e.g., area director, committee chair, etc.
2. Ask if the pastor has any knowledge of Young Life; listen carefully.
3. Share appropriate Young Life information based on the pastor's knowledge of Young Life: You could utilize the Young Life Overview and Statement of Faith brochures or your local area business plan. You could have them watch the DVD *In The World of Kids* or a PowerPoint tailored to your local area ministry. **Make sure to share that Young Life has existed since 1941.** This will lower the pastor's level of concern because he or she will understand that this is an established ministry.
4. Ask if the congregation would be willing to pray for Young Life. You could also ask for names of potential leaders or financial support from the church depending on the situation.
5. Make sure you state aloud when you have utilized your 15 minutes and that you want to honor his or her time. If he or she wants to talk more, then you can stay.
6. After your initial meeting, continue to send prayer requests and local ministry information.

Sample Agenda: Pastor Luncheon

Hand out nametags and raffle tickets when the pastors arrive, 90 minutes maximum.

1. Introductions/Prayer (Keep it brief)
2. Lunch (Keep it simple)
3. Raffle time – Young Life fun
4. Speaker/DVD/other – “What is Young Life” (You might want to have a kid story here)
5. Small/large group discussions and sharing – “Describe what teenagers are like today” (This type of activity is very important)
6. Thank and conclude (You could invite them to be adult guests at camp)

A Church Fund-Raising Strategy

- Create a separate strategy for raising funds from churches.
- Separate line item on your cash flow revenue side.
- Create church sub-committee.
- Identify best prospects.
 - Attended by staff, volunteers and committee.
 - Those with history of giving to specific programs you are trying to fund.
 - Partner with Young Life in some capacity (e.g., provide office space or share programs)
 - Churches close by the schools or large well-funded churches.
- Create a list of churches in your area most likely to participate.
- Distribute to committee members who will identify those they have a connection with or know someone who does.
- Identify a primary caller and try to identify a member who is in a leadership role in the church.
 - Research websites online or call the church office — identify guidelines, application process, mission statement of the church's outreach committee (some only give to missionary cases, etc). If you have a strong contact, still may want to pursue and introduce them to Young Life.
 - Presentations to mission committee, inviting key church folks to club, banquets, camp or other special activities effective in introducing church to Young Life.
 - Identify primary caller — staff person is typically not the one making initial contact unless they have best relationship.
 - Strategy for initial contact — going to Sunday school to do a presentation usually not most effective but is very effective for saying thank you, building volunteers.
 - Who is best contact at church — head of missions committee is typically best. Perhaps the senior pastor if relationship is established with him or her.
- Present Young Life as missionaries going into the field to bring lost kids to church.
- Determine best initial approach.
 - Letter of inquiry
 - Phone call
 - Personal visit
- Proposal – Be prepared to:
 - Identify who will write, sign and coordinate the site visit if required.
 - Know your area boundaries and ethnic break down.
 - Understand your budget and needs.
 - Report on other foundations, churches, corporations that give to Young Life in your city.
 - Identify specific needs in your school district and specific challenges youth face.
 - General operations or specific — seed new club, YoungLives, camp scholarships.
 - Show sustainability — not dependent on this gift. Let them know your track record. Let them know statistics, goals and timelines; how you will evaluate.
 - Update with consistent written information/visits even if denial.
 - Find out who makes the final decision — when you call them for guidelines make sure to keep asking questions to keep your name up front.

A Brief History: Young Life and the Local Church

There has been a long history of Young Life and the local church working together so more kids could have the opportunity to follow Jesus and grow in their faith. There should be a natural positive working relationship between the local Young Life ministry and area churches because they are all members of the body of Christ.

Early in his life, Jim Rayburn was the pastor of three churches in New Mexico and Arizona. Later, while attending seminary in Texas, he served as the assistant pastor for youth ministry at a church in Gainesville, Texas. It was during his work with the young people in Gainesville that he began to experiment with ways to do more effective youth ministry. This work eventually led to the official formation of the Young Life ministry in 1941. In addition, from 1948-1962 Jim taught the adult Sunday School class at his local church.

In 1950 Bill Starr, who was in charge of the Young Life ministry in Portland, Ore., developed the first "committee." Bill Starr went to eight local churches and asked for financial support for the ministry, as well as for one couple from each church to serve on the new committee. Together the eight churches funded the entire Young Life budget and each church enlisted a couple to serve on the committee. Bill Starr later became the second president of Young Life.

Throughout the years, church pastors have taught at training sessions, and participated in panel discussions. Numerous pastors have joined the Young Life staff, and many Young Life staff have become church pastors.

When churches and Young Life work together to evangelize and disciple the young people in their communities, they can equip them to go deeper in their faith and to share the Gospel with others.

What is Young Life?

Young Life greatly appreciates the work that local churches do among teens. Young Life complements that work by reaching out to kids — through the tools of contact work, club, Campaigners and camp — who might not attend activities at a local church.

One of the principle characteristics of Young Life ministry is that we go to the kids. We interact with them right where they are. It's called contact work and that's why you'll find Young Life leaders at school athletic events, social events and other "non-church" settings. In an increasingly secular society, we're able to engage kids by providing an environment that feels more "neutral" to them.



Young Life is committed to discipleship and we know that local church involvement is essential for following Christ throughout one's lifetime. We promote active involvement in the local church among the kids who are growing in their faith, and we try to communicate that Young Life is not a substitute for their local church. We also offer them the opportunity to join us in making an impact on their school for Christ. We do encourage kids to talk with their families about their church choice. When appropriate, Young Life staff and leaders will make suggestions.

Partnering with the local church is important to Young Life. Although congregations can minister in ways we can't, Young Life has inroads in communities with kids who are disinterested in church. However, as Young Life staff and leaders care for these kids, we try to help them become life-long followers of Jesus Christ who will one day be active in the life of a local church.

FAQs for Churches

Does Young Life staff make recommendations to kids about which church to attend?

Young Life values the role that churches can play in kids' lives. Young Life staff and leaders are committed followers of Jesus Christ and come from many denominations. We encourage kids to become involved in the churches that are most familiar to their families, and to respect the faith traditions of their families when it comes to denominational issues. If their families are not connected with a church, we offer suggestions when appropriate. If the family already attends a church, kids are encouraged to attend there as well. If not, Young Life staff and leaders will help kids find a church they feel comfortable attending.

Our church already has a youth program. In what way does Young Life support the ministry of the local church?

Young Life recognizes and appreciates that many churches have outstanding youth programs. Our goal is not to compete with these programs, but to complement what they do. In today's increasingly secularized society, there are many kids who wouldn't attend activities at a church. Many of these kids, however, feel comfortable attending a Young Life function because it feels more "neutral" and informal to them. This is one way we support the ministry of the local church — by reaching kids whom they might not be able to reach.

I've read your Statement of Faith and don't see any position on a doctrinal issue that is important to me. How can I find out Young Life's position on this issue?

Generally speaking, Young Life doesn't promote specific positions on doctrinal issues that aren't directly related to our Statement of Faith. We understand that there are key doctrinal questions that are very important to individuals. If you have a specific question, we invite you to submit it to us and we will be happy to respond.

What should parents say when their kid tells them he's been to Young Life club during the week and now he doesn't need to go to church on Sunday?

We try to make it clear to kids that Young Life is not a substitute for their local church. Our emphasis in Young Life is reaching out to kids with the Gospel, introducing them to Christ and helping them to grow in that relationship. While Young Life is not officially connected to any particular denomination (Protestant or Catholic), we believe church is a very important part of nurturing a relationship with Christ. We encourage kids to live connected to the body of Christ by being an active member of a local congregation. The church provides ministries in the life of a young believer which we do not seek to duplicate. Hopefully new young believers will find meaning in relationships in a local congregation which will last the rest of their lives.

Developing Relationships with Local Churches: Case Studies

Calling on Church Staff for Prayer — During the past several years, Steve, a committee member in Florida, has visited with key staff members in 15-18 churches in locations where Young Life has a presence. While meeting with these senior or youth pastors or heads of mission boards, his primary purpose is to ask them to pray for Young Life. Currently, he has 26 church staff members who have agreed to pray for Young Life and to receive his monthly prayer request e-mail. When he sends the prayer request e-mail, he sometimes attaches articles about the local Young Life ministry or a brief PowerPoint about the local ministry that could be shown on the electronic bulletin board prior to the Sunday church service. *Greater Charlotte Harbor Florida Area, FL41*

Multicultural Initiative — Several years ago a man who had served on the area committee became a pastor. He understood that an effective Young Life club is helpful in reaching kids for Christ. Therefore, he offered the use of his church facilities for club and other Young Life activities. According to Erica, the Young Life staff person, “Recently, the church moved to an even more central location in the urban area and the pastor again invited us to utilize the church facilities!” This “new” church is located in a former architectural office building and has a lot of spaces for various Young Life activities. It is also near a park and the local recreation center where kids can hang out prior to club. Several of the club kids go to this church. Erica writes thank you notes to the pastor and keeps him informed about the ministry. She plans to have students write him notes in the future. *Columbus, Georgia Area, GA20*

Pastors’ Luncheon — “We were a new startup area and our regional director suggested we host a luncheon for local pastors,” states Debbie, the area director. “The regional director agreed to pay for the luncheon, as well as to come and speak. Knowing that pastors receive a number of invitations for lunch, we decided to distinguish ourselves from others by delivering a basket of assorted homemade cookies to each church pastor with an invitation attached. The first year, 20 senior or youth pastors attended. We discovered that they really enjoyed getting together as a group. We also made sure that they were provided with an opportunity to talk at the luncheon. The first year our group topic was, ‘Describe Teenagers Today.’ We explained what Young Life was doing and invited them to attend camp as adult guests. We held our luncheon three years in a row and then decided to move to an every-other-year format.” *Sonoma, California Area, CA 461*

Ongoing Pastor Breakfast — Joe says, “As a committee chair and member, and volunteer leader in our area, I realized that our churches ‘supported’ us but were not committed to us, and that our pastors and youth pastors and our Young Life staff and volunteers really didn’t know each other. So I started meeting once or twice a month at a local fast-food restaurant for breakfast with one senior pastor I knew who had been a youth pastor. We talked about everything except his church and Young Life. He then invited his youth pastor to join us for breakfast, and I invited my area director. Sometimes there are as many as 12 senior and youth pastors who attend. We have no agenda except to build relationships, pray for each other and do what is best for the kids in our community.” *Cass County, Missouri Area, MO 28*

Advantages of Building Relationships Between Young Life & Churches

Advantages for Young Life

Church relationships can:

- Give credibility to Young Life
- Provide housing for staff
- Provide financial support to the ministry
- Give pastoral guidance and spiritual leadership
- Be a catalyst for new ministries
- Develop a partnership as a model for other Christian organizations to emulate
- Provide stability in times of crisis
- Give outreach opportunities for church kids to bring their unchurched friends to club
- Open doors in the community to meet potential leaders, committee members and donors
- Allow use of facilities for Young Life office space
- Reduce the competition between the local church and Young Life

Advantages for Churches

A relationship with Young Life can:

- Bring vibrancy to church youth groups
- Provide access to Young Life camps for church youth groups
- Provide job opportunities for Young Life staff and volunteer leaders
- Provide youth ministry training for youth pastors
- Help connect youth pastors with each other
- Encourage the local church to reach out to kids who are unchurched
- Increase church membership by attracting young people and their families
- Provide youth pastors additional volunteer ministry experiences by serving in the Young Life ministry
- Allow new youth pastors to utilize the spiritual expertise of the Young Life staff
- Open doors into schools for local churches