

Funding Youth Convention: Sane Ways to Raise Money

Mennonite youth convention is a very important event for our youth. At convention, youth are invited to commit or recommit their lives to Jesus Christ. They are also introduced to the larger Mennonite community of faith. Many youth are amazed and encouraged by how many other Mennonite youth there are. Worship, seminars, servant projects, small group time and many other convention activities challenge youth to live for Christ and invite them to greater participation in the church.

This immensely valuable experience does come with a large price tag. We all know this only too well as convention gets closer and closer! Some sponsors question whether they should be spending so much energy raising money for youth convention. They shouldn't. That's right, they shouldn't! BUT that doesn't mean they shouldn't *go!* It means that there may be better ways to fund this important trip. The cost of convention should be shared by the congregation, parents and youth themselves.

I especially sympathize with youth sponsors who are overwhelmed by the task of raising money. Youth sponsors SHOULD NOT be in charge of raising money for convention! It is simply too much to ask youth sponsors to raise thousands of dollars every year AND be the spiritual mentors and guides for the youth group. Free your sponsors to tend to spiritual nurture by assigning fundraising responsibility to the congregation, parents and youth themselves. And by all means, do not expect youth sponsors to pay their own way to convention. They already give their vacation time (and sometimes take time off without pay) to go.

Most Central Plains congregations are convinced of the value of the youth attending convention. These churches should consider investing in their youth by putting all or part of the anticipated cost in the budget: one half the cost each year.

If that isn't possible, or if only a portion of the cost can be covered in the budget, have parents of the youth take turns organizing fundraisers. One couple could be in charge of the overall coordination of fund-raisers. Or, appoint a fundraising committee of interested church members.

Also, consider how much each family could contribute toward the cost of convention. Families routinely pay large sums for opportunities like music camp or sports camps. An investment in their youth's commitment to Christ and the church should be even more important.

Some churches do a combination of these things, such as having the congregations pay one third, the family one third and the youth group fundraisers contributing one third of the cost. Do what works in your context, but do free the youth sponsors to do *ministry*.

Best Practices

- Appoint a fundraising committee of the parents of youth to take leadership of youth group fundraising. Youth sponsors have enough to do without being responsible for fundraising too.
- Raise money all year, every year. This spreads out the work (and the stress!) of raising money. Don't wait until a convention year to start raising money for convention.

- No matter what size your congregation is, think in terms of having 8-10 fundraisers every year.
- Be aware of what other organizations in your community are doing for fundraisers and be sure to do something different.
- Be sure to communicate what your fundraisers are for, especially when raising money from the congregation.
- Provide opportunities for interested donors to give “above and beyond,” such as freewill donation baskets, auctions, or even establishing a fund they can direct their donation to.
- Try to have at least a few fundraisers that bring in dollars from beyond your congregation.
- Take care to expend energy only on projects that are really profitable. Strive to have fewer, more profitable fundraisers rather than many low-profit ones.

Fundraising Ideas

- A meal after church. Some common ideas include taco bar, potato bar, breakfast, fried mush, lasagna, pizza, chili, soup & bread, and favorite ethnic foods. You can also offer a meal in connection to a church meeting.
- Many restaurants invite fundraisers: Chili’s, HuHot, Pizza Ranch are some I’ve heard of.
- Service auction. Youth write down what they are willing to do for folks such as clean house, make a meal, babysit, mow lawn, and the services of each youth are auctioned to the highest bidder.
- Formal banquet: Valentine, Christmas, dinner theater, etc. Charge \$20 or more per ticket.
- Casseroles made to order and delivered frozen in three sizes.
- Selling cans of pop during “coffee hour” or “fellowship time” on Sunday morning.
- Offer a “savings plan” in which each youth’s family pledges to give a certain amount every month, and this money goes directly to that youth’s individual account.
- Offer “stock certificates” to congregational members who “invest” in the youth group. Find creative ways to give them special recognition and special reports from the youth group.
- Concessions at university arena games or local festivals; clean-up arena after university events.
- Give every household a 2-liter bottle of pop. Ask them to collect their change in the empty bottle and bring it back to the youth group after a period of months.
- Flamingo Insurance — Sell flamingo insurance to church members in various amounts which guarantee that their homes will not be the flocking ground of pink flamingo lawn ornaments. Place as many lawn ornaments as you can on uninsured lawns, and charge a service fee for their removal. To add even more fun, one member can hire a flamingo hit on another member by paying more than what that person bought their insurance for. Provide the opportunity for the insured to increase their insurance amount.
- Sell stuff from a company designed for fundraisers like Youth Group Promotions.
- Google “youth group fundraising ideas”!



Central Plains Mennonite Conference Youth Ministry Resources

The mission of Central Plains Mennonite Conference is to create settings for our congregations to grow in holistic witness to God’s reconciling mission in the world by developing leadership, encouraging fellowship, and promoting lifelong discipleship.

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