



CREATIVE YOUTH MINISTRY IDEAS FOR LENT:

ENGAGING TEENS
ON THE JOURNEY TO EASTER
& BEYOND

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INTRODUCTION

A helpful way to connect creative worship experiences to the reality of a teen's daily life is to center those experiences around the seasons of the liturgical year: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. There are still many protestant churches who pay very little attention to the liturgical calendar expect perhaps for the seasons of Christmas and Easter. This is an artifact of the Reformation when Protestants rejected many of the Christian holy days and seasons as non-Biblical. Unfortunately, much was lost in this period of transition -- in particular, a sense of how secular time overlaps and intersects with God's time. By helping youth to observe the liturgical year, we provide them an opportunity to connect the rhythms of their daily lives with the rhythms of their faith. One season of the liturgical year that is ripe with imagery, sounds, tastes, smells and experiences is the contemplative season of Lent. Below you will find a series of creative learning and worship experiences to help youth explore this season as a way to keep one foot in their daily routines and one foot in God's calendar.

Each section that follows has been adapted, in part or in whole, from various posts to the blog [Rethinking Youth Ministry](#).

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WHAT IS LENT?

The season of Lent begins with the observance of Ash Wednesday and ends the day before Easter Sunday. Though many protestant churches pay little attention to the seasons of the church year, we miss out when we ignore the introspective season of Lent with our youth. This forty day season (the Sundays are not counted in the forty) is a time to reflect on one's journey of faith, to examine our relationships, and to become a part of the story of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem and the cross. By observing this season, we invite youth to step out of regular time (school...jobs...dating...) and into God's time for awhile.

Like Advent, Lent is a contemplative season. A time of preparation for Easter, Lent is often regarded as a penitential season when we examine our lives and repent or gain a new perspective or path forward. Christians often take up special spiritual practices during Lent such as fasting and observing extra times of Sabbath, study, and prayer. The popular practice of "giving up something" for Lent really has nothing to do with exercising one's self-control. Rather, it is a way to make space in our regular routines to allow God to do something new in our lives.

CREATIVE PRAYER STATIONS

Why must everything in youth ministry be so programmed? How about just allowing some free unstructured time when your youth are gathered? How much of that do they ever get in their daily routine? The "Rest Stop" ideas below would be a simple way to create Lenten spaces within your youth room that would allow teens, whenever the spirit moves them, to step away and just sink into a time of meditation and introspection. Rather than organizing a time when all the youth cycle through the "rest stops," just leave an open invitation for teens



to make use of them as needed (and what a nice gift this would be for your introverted youth who might want a good excuse to bow out of a crazy, wild game but still have something meaningful to do).

Rest Stop 1 - Rocky Road: Set-up includes some smooth rocks (found at craft stores) and permanent ink pens. Suggested text: Joshua 4: 21-24.



Directions: *In the Old Testament, journeys are often marked with altars of rocks as a way to show where something important has happened – to mark the way across a difficult path – to say: "We were here. We endured." Consider writing a word on one of the rocks before you – a word about your spiritual journey, your struggles, your questions, your doubts, your triumphs – and add it to our altar of stones to symbolize that your story of walking this wilderness journey is part of the faith story of our whole community.*

Rest Stop 2 – Write: Set-up for this includes several bibles, pens, and notepads or journals on which you have attached or written a question, one per journal, about a text you would like youth to reflect upon in writing.

Directions: *Reflect on the scripture passage before you. Consider the questions below and offer your thoughts on them in one or more of the journals before you. Your response may be brief or lengthy. You may choose to write your thoughts, write a poem, or even just write one word. When finished, reflect for a moment on what God might be trying to say to you through the words of this text. Where might God's Spirit be leading you by way of this scripture? Pray for openness to that call.*





Rest Stop 3 - Tree of Life: Set-up for this requires a potted tree or a tree branch placed in some sort of stand. Cut-out leaf shapes from green paper, punch a hole in the end of each leaf and thread a piece of yarn or string through the hole. Suggested text: Mark 3: 7.

Directions: *Many individuals accompany us on the journey of faith and through the wilderness. Some offer us a shoulder to lean on when we tire of the walk. Others ask for our help when they weary of the journey. Take some time to reflect on those in your life, past or present, who you want to*

remember in prayer. Write each name on a leaf and attach the leaves to the tree, reflecting on how these relationships provide us opportunities to grow in the ways of love, kindness, hospitality, peace, patience and grace.

Rest Stop 4 - Postcards to God: String a clothesline somewhere in the room and provide clothespins or paperclips. Create "postcards" out of colored cardstock and glue various images from magazines on the front, or leave some blank. Suggested text: Psalm 139.



Directions: *Lent is part of the journey of faith. Think about how far you have come already. What have been the challenges of your walk with Christ so far? The ups? The downs? The blind alleys? The backtracks? The side trips? The spiritual companions along the way? Take time to write a postcard to God from this point on your spiritual journey. Select a postcard with an image that connects with your experience, or draw your own picture. You could pose a question to God, ask for guidance, describe where you are right now on the journey, or give thanks for those who have walked with you. Leave the postcard on the clothesline before you to inspire others.*



Rest Stop 5 - Reality: On a wall, set out a series of images of events and people in need from around the world (I pulled most of my images from news magazines and National Geographic.) Separate the photos to make it easier to focus on one at a time. Suggested text: Matthew 5: 5.

Directions: *Search the images before you, representing the struggles of our world until one hooks your attention. Meditate on it for a moment. Consider where you see God in the image. It may be hard to discern at first. Sometimes it seems God is hidden away and we have to focus our attention more carefully. Ask yourself: How is God calling me to pray for this situation, place, or people? Offer your thoughts as a prayer for the concerns of this world.*

WHAT IS LENT? A BIBLE STUDY

Lent is perhaps one of the least understood times of the Christian calendar, yet with its emphasis on introspection, spiritual journeying, and repentance, I think it is a season tailor-made for tapping into the adolescent search for identity.

Focus: Lent is a time to look inward to seek how we might more fully accept God's love and peace and grace in our lives.

Materials needed: Bibles, copy of questions for opening activity, undecorated paper mache masks, glue, magazines, markers, note cards, pens.

1) Opening Activity: (10 minutes) Play "One Step Forward, One Step Back." Line group across the middle of the room and ask the questions below. Those who get the answer right, take one step forward. Those who get the question wrong take one step back. The "winner" (and aren't we ALL winners?) is the first one to cross the finish line where you are standing. What do they win? Hmmm? How about something purple?

- The official (liturgical) color of Lent is red. True or False? (False. It's purple – representing royalty and repentance.)



- Lent lasts for 40 days, not counting Sundays. True or False? (True.)
- The word Lent comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word meaning "midwinter." (False. It translates "springtime" since that is the time of year the season generally falls.)
- The 40 days of Lent are a reminder of the Bible story in which Jesus spends 40 days alone in the wilderness and is tempted by the Devil. True or False? (True. It also recalls the 40 years the Israelites wandered in the wilderness.)
- Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, when people often have the sign of the cross made of ashes placed on their foreheads. Most often, these ashes are made by burning palm leaves from the previous year's Palm Sunday service. True or False? (True.)
- The ash is supposed to represent the story in which Jesus places dirt or ash on a blind man's eyes to make him see again. True or False? (False. The ashes represent humility and our own mortality – from dust we came and to dust we shall return.)
- Many people give up something during Lent. The point of this practice is to show your willpower. True or False? (False. It is a practice of self-denial that allows room in your life for God to do something new.)

- Fasting is a common practice in Lent but the one day people don't fast during Lent is Sundays. True or False? (True. People traditionally do not fast on Sundays as Sundays are to be reminders or a foretaste of the coming resurrection.)
- The phrase "Glory to God" is traditionally never spoken during Lent and does not make its return until Easter morning. True or False. (False. "Alleluia" is the what many churches abstain from saying in worship during Lent.)
- The last week of Lent is known as "Holy Week." True or False? (True.)
- On Maundy Thursday, the last Thursday in Lent, we recall the last night and meal that Jesus shares with his disciples. True or False? (True.)

2) Digging In: (25 minutes) People often wear masks during the Mardi Gras activities that come just before Lent. Masks symbolize the way we often try to hide our sinfulness or our true nature. Lent is a time of taking off our masks, of examining our true selves, of being real before God so that we can come to understand that God knows us fully, forgives us, loves us, and encourages us to grow and become all we were created to be. Within this context, give youth an unfinished paper mache mask (available in craft stores. If you can't find those masks use the smaller half masks that just cover the eyes). Ask them to decorate the outside of the mask with words, images, and colors that represent how others see their "outside" self. On the inside of the mask, encourage them to display their "inside" self – their fears, their doubts, their

shortcomings. When finish, invite responses from youth about the experience of creating these masks.

3) Going Deeper: (20 minutes) Invite youth to read the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4: 1-11). Ask one or more persons to read the narration, another to read the words of Jesus, and one or more to read the words of the Tempter. Help the group to explore this story where Jesus goes off on his own to do some soul-searching and, in a sense, confront his own demons. The journey Jesus takes into the desert -- the journey to be alone with God and to seek God's guidance about our true identity -- is the journey we are all invited to focus on during Lent.

ASK:

- What do you think Jesus might have had to give up to journey to the wilderness alone?
- The things the Tempter offers him are not intrinsically bad: food in a time of hunger, political power in a time of Roman oppression, a leap of faith. So why do you think Jesus resists these temptations?
- What memories do you have of times you faced choices that at the time seemed like good ideas but were ultimately led you in an unhealthy or unfaithful direction?

- Share what you do when you want time alone to think/pray/reflect. Where do you go? What do you do?
- What might be the benefit of spending time in Lent examining your life, considering your sins, thinking about what God wants for you?

4) Reaching Out: (20 minutes) Distribute note cards and ask participants to draw a line down the center. Invite them to echo Jesus' journey by writing on one side of the card something they will consider "giving up" during Lent (food, TV, internet, etc.) and on the other side something new they would like to take on during Lent that might help them connect more deeply with the experience of God in their daily lives (prayer, random acts of kindness, helping their parents, going to worship, reading the Bible, exercise, etc). Encourage youth to keep these note cards and place them somewhere that they will see them daily in the coming weeks of Lent.

Finally, invite the group to gather in a circle and place their completed masks in the center as an offering to God of both their inner and outer selves. Conclude together with a prayer of confession and assurance of pardon.

A RECIPE FOR YOU

Lent is a season of self-reflection. Challenge youth to take stock of who they are and whose they are with this creative project.

Ask youth to think about what it would be like if we walked around with t-shirts on all day that broadcast to others the basic gist of who we are. Ask: What would your t-shirt say -- 50% confused, 30% spiritual, 5% musical, 15% distracted? Or imagine you are expressed as a recipe. What would be your ingredients? A dash of humor? Two spoonfuls of doubt? A cup of sweetness but two cups of sour grapes?

Invite youth to spend some time thinking about themselves, both as they imagine others perceive them and as they would like to be perceived. You could approach this as a writing project, an art project or even have teens bring blank white t-shirts on which they describe themselves. When finished, spend some time talking about what it was like having to think more deeply about themselves and what makes up who they are. Where is God in that mix of attributes and ingredients? What part of their life includes their faith? What attributes or ingredients do they wish they could change or add? Given who they see themselves to be, where might God be calling for them to use their unique talents, gifts, shortcomings, and personalities in ministry and mission?

Note: For any version of this activity, you might want to include a time of affirmation

in which youth contribute to each other's creations by adding positive descriptive words about one another to each person's writing, art, or t-shirt.

PRAYER VIGIL

In the ancient church, it was common for those preparing for baptism to stay up all night and prepare, through prayer and meditation, for Easter morning. Consider doing a prayer vigil with your youth the night before Easter. You could make it a lock-in. Or, you could have the sanctuary available all night long with different youth (and their parents) signed up to make sure someone is praying for an entire twenty-four hours.

SEDER MEAL

Have a Maundy Thursday meal or a [Seder meal](#). This is a great way to teach youth the traditions of the church and involve other members of the congregation.

TAIZE WORSHIP

Host a [Taize service](#). Youth need to take the time to slow down. Taize services are rooted in simplicity and meditation. All you need is someone to either lead songs or music (there are lots of great cd's available).

SPONSOR A FAST

Fast from email for a week. Have youth write letters to one another. The kind where you actually use an envelope and stamp. You could start this off at youth group by having your youth spend time in silence writing letters.

SEVEN LAST WORDS

On Good Friday, email or tweet the [seven last words](#) of the cross.

THE H2O PROJECT

We talk a lot about giving up something for Lent and so often we forget that the whole reason for doing so is to make room in your spiritual journey for something new! If you give up your morning cup of coffee, use that time to pray. If you fast one day a week, use some of that non-eating time to serve food at a soup kitchen. If you give up cussing out all the terrible drivers on the road, focus instead on helping others make their way in traffic.

Or how about this: give up every liquid you normally purchase (soda, sports drinks, tea, coffee, OJ, milk, etc.) and drink only water and use the money you save to help provide drinkable water for others. This is exactly the challenge offered by the [H2O Project](#) in cooperation with [Living Water International](#). You, your youth ministry, and your church are challenged to make water your only beverage for two weeks during Lent. As part of the challenge, you set aside the money you would have spent on other drinks. At the end of the two weeks you pool your funds and use them to help *Living Water International* in their mission to bring clean, safe water to nearly 10 million people in desperate need through the digging of wells in over 26 countries. So spread the word to other youth ministry folks and help young people change the world this Lenten season.

At the project's [website](#), you can download a whole list of free resources and supplies, connect your teens with the project's [Facebook page](#), as well as order free wristbands, posters, and a video to share with your group in order to promote the project.

WAYS TO PRAY: ONLINE RESOURCES

Is prayer a regular part of your youth ministry gatherings? Lent is a season that particularly lends itself to invite youth to begin exploring the spiritual practice of prayer or to offer them new ways to experience prayer. Below are several online resources that might be helpful:

12 Ways to Pray During Lent – From the excellent [Beliefnet](#) site, [here](#) is a set of brief descriptions of simple but thoughtful prayer practices ranging from lighting a candle to "yelling like heck." This list could easily be adapted into a prayer journal for youth. Or perhaps pass out the list and invite youth, as an experiment, to try each practice during the week and share their experiences at your next gathering.

Pray Without Ceasing – That was Paul's suggestion. But you can't go around all day with your head bowed and your hands folded, so [here](#) are a wide variety of suggested prayer practices that can be incorporated into your youth ministry during Lent. Need more? Many of [these ideas](#) could be incorporated into prayer exercises. [These](#) would be cool too.

Create a Space – Some teens like the idea of creating a sacred space that can either be set up in their bedroom or even taken with them "on the go" as a sort of prayer altar. [This](#) Lenten idea invites you to collect 7 items you would take with you if you tried to duplicate Jesus' 40 day spiritual journey into the wilderness. Why not challenge your youth to take up the challenge?

Seeds for Lent - Check out [this set](#) of Flickr images of Lenten reflection cards created by Mark Pierson.

A Breathing Prayer – So [simple](#). A prayer in which you focus on your breathing as a way to remember the one who is the source of life.

PRAYER PATH

Create a simple circular path out of tape on the floor or chairs and rope. Design the path to wind in on itself and reach an open center space that is equipped with pillows on the floor and written instructions for participants to sit and offer silent prayers for those people who have been important to their own prayer journey and to offer thanks to God for their guidance.



Play-Do Prayers - Provide a variety of play-do colors and invite worshippers to create a mini-sculpture to represent a particular prayer need, joy, or concern. As participants finish, they can add their creation to those of others and contemplate and lift up all the other prayers that have been depicted.

Water Prayers - Provide a large glass bowl and pitcher of water. Provide instructions for participants to offer a silent prayer and pour a small amount of water into the bowl. As each person prays, his or her water prayers are mixed with those of others as the bowl fills.



Mural Prayers - Tape a large sheet of paper to a wall and provide markers and crayons. Worshippers can use this canvas to create a mural of prayers on a particular topic (such as "the world" or "peace" or "hurt") or it could be used graffiti-style, allowing for individual creativity to represent words, pictures, symbols, poetry, etc. to offer up prayers to God.

Braided prayers - Set out colorful strips of cloth and a length of clothesline tied between two trees or posts. Invite worshippers to take three cloth strips to represent three people or things they want to pray about. Tie the ends of the three strips to the clothesline and then braid the three together, all the while meditating and praying on



the selected pray concerns. Encourage participants to take note of the braided cloths left by others and to consider their prayers as well.



Prayer Stones - Assemble a collection of smooth stones and ask participants to choose one and hold it firmly in their hands, focusing on and praying for a particular joy or concern. When ready, worshippers should take a sharpie and write a word or phrase on the stone to represent their prayer and then add it to the growing pile left by others.

Candle Shape Prayers - Set out a number of votive candles and a lighter. Instruct a small group to work together, in silence, to form together a shape or symbol to represent a prayer need of the world. When the group senses the image is complete, have them work together to light each candle, hold hands, and pray in silence.



Pipe Cleaner Prayers - Invite worshippers to take several pipe cleaners and form a shape or design that communicates a prayer concern. Ask them to add their creation to those of others and to spend time contemplating all the prayer concerns represented.

Of course, any of these prayer experiences could be enhanced by providing scriptures to read, sacred music, written questions to encourage thought and meditation, or icons such as images of Jesus or biblical stories in art.

10 SIMPLE CREATIVE PRAYER IDEAS

Sometimes teens have trouble knowing how to pray, particularly if they are alone, so these suggestions are designed to be simple yet meaningful:

The Examen: This is a cool ancient form of prayer that asks you to think back over the last week or month. Let your mind wander through the following questions as you pray: Thinking back over the recent past, focus on the moments when you were most grateful and the moments when you were least grateful. What were they? Which moments did you give and receive God's love the most? When did you give and receive love the least? When you were paying the most attention to the love of God in the world? When were you paying the least attention? Finish by thanking God for the gift of today and ask for guidance in being more open to God's presence in your daily life.

Pray Scripture. Pick up a Bible and start reading. Select a verse such as "*Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these, my brethren, you did it to me*" and turn it into a prayer: "*God help me to reach out to the least of these in my world and to treat them as your beloved children.*" Or select a psalm as an inspiration for prayer. Try taking the Lord's prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) and write your own translation in a way that reflects your life and needs.

Be quiet. If prayer is a conversation, then you also need to listen in silence. Simply sit in silence, perhaps close your eyes, and see what comes to you from God.

Give Thanks: Using paper or a journal, make a word cloud or list of all the things in your life or in the world for which you are thankful. If you are feeling artistic, doodle images of all the things you are thankful for today.

Repeat a word or phrase: Repeating a simple prayer over and over can focus your thoughts and free your mind to be open to new things. Pick a word to say slowly and repeatedly to yourself quietly (or in your thoughts) such as *love, peace, life*, or perhaps the name of someone or something important to you. You could also choose a phrase such as “Jesus, be with me” or “God so loves the world” or “Open my mind, open my heart,”

Ask Questions. What are the big questions of life you’d like answers to today? You know--the ones like “Why is there suffering in the world?” Spend some time just asking those questions, one after another, offering them to God and see what happens.

Imagine. Close your eyes for awhile and imagine the world as God would have it be – not as it is. What do you see? How is that world different from the one we live in today? Now imagine yourself as part of that vision, helping to make it come true. What are you doing? How is God calling you to be part of bringing that vision to reality in your own little corner of the world?

Walk the Labyrinth. Print a copy of a [finger labyrinth](#). Sit in a quiet place and take time to slowly trace your finger along the path of the labyrinth, all the way to the center and then slowly back out. Even better, use a finger of your non-dominant hand. As you move along the path, spend time thinking about your journey of faith, the journey of your life, all the people you have met, the things you have done, the problems you have overcome, the challenges you still face, and focus on where you have encountered God along the way.

CREATIVE PRAYER NIGHT FOR YOUTH



These activities are based on a night of creative prayer utilizing in part the resources from the [Way to Live](#) website and the excellent [prayer resources](#) provided by Grahame Knox at the [Insight](#) youth ministry blog. Youth were challenged to work in teams to take Jesus' model for prayer, the Lord's Prayer, and write their own version of the prayer in language that was meaningful to them. The evening culminated with a time of center-based worship in our chapel. Youth were invited to move about the chapel in silence, experiencing several different prayer stations.

Prayer Station 1: Friends and Family - Youth wrote prayers for the people in their lives and placed them in a cross taped to the floor (see above - one of the creative ideas from Insight!)

Prayer Station 2: Creation - Youth sat in a mini-garden in our chapel, listened to running water and offered prayers of thanks for the blessings of creation.

Prayer Station 3: Anger - Youth read psalms that express anger and challenge to God (such as Psalm 88: 12-18) and then they were invited, graffiti-style on paper posted on a wall, to write their own prayers of anger for the injustice in the world.

Prayer Station 4: You! - Youth used tinfoil to craft symbols of prayers related to their own personal needs.

Prayer Station 5: Forgiveness - Youth were challenged to think back over the mistakes of the past week, to write a word or symbol in sand representing those failures, and then to pass their hand through the sand, obliterating those words or symbols as a sign of accepting God's forgiveness.



POST SECRET

Use the idea behind the website [PostSecret](#) to invite your youth into the spiritual practice of confession as part of their Lenten journey.

For many Protestants, the spiritual practice of confession only finds expression a few Sundays a year during Lent in the form of responsive readings in worship. I'll admit that I generally refuse to participate in these "Dear, God...we are so wretched and unworthy of your love" type of liturgies. Yet, the practice of confession is

a powerful way of reminding us of the unique relationship we have with God. It's not that in confession we share secrets that God does not already know. Rather, it is in the act of confessing that we are reminded that God knows us completely, even in our brokenness, and yet still loves us unconditionally.



It's no great revelation to say that teenagers struggle with identity and self-worth and may find the notion of God's unconditional love difficult to accept. I have to imagine the world would be a better place if we could help people learn to both be honest about their brokenness and also accept that despite their "sin" they are beloved of God. What better place to start than with our youth?

You could invite your group into a conversation and practice of confession by tapping into the popularity of [PostSecret](#) -- a blog that features confessional postcards sent in by real people. Some of these confessions are funny, some touching, and some sad and tragic. Perhaps show the group some of the postcards from the PostSecret website (or one of the PostSecret [books](#)) and then set out a variety of art materials (paint, markers, crayons, magazine images, glue, etc) and provide each teen with a large blank index card. Ask them to find a spot where they can work quietly alone as they create their own confessional postcard. You may not want your youth to confess deep dark secrets. Instead, invite them into a time of introspection. Consider offering them some sentence starters like these:

Something I don't want anyone to know about me is...

I wish I could stop....

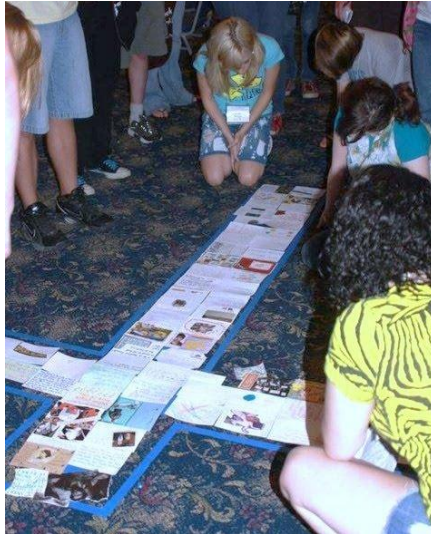
I always lie when someone asks me...

I think people wouldn't like me if they knew...

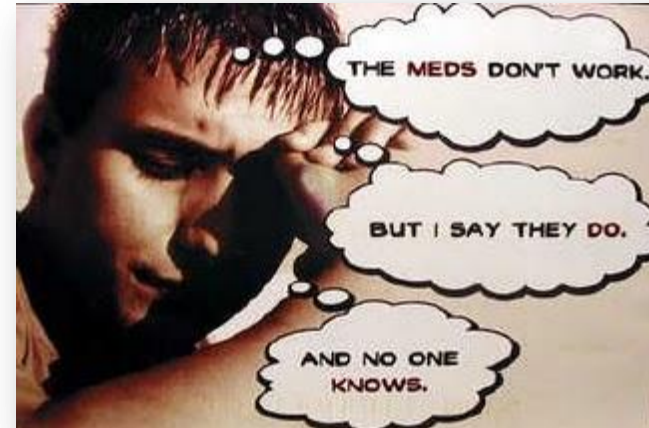
I feel guilty when...

One thing I wish I could change about myself is...

I hope no one ever finds out that...



Option: Use masking tape to create a cross on the floor. Youth place their postcards face down in the cross and tape them all together on the back. Then flip the cross over to reveal the confessions.



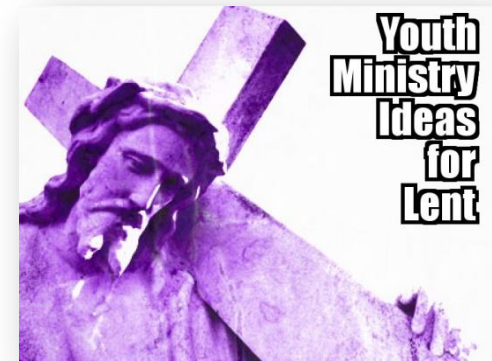
It's important to maintain anonymity in a project like this. When students finish their work, perhaps have them place all the postcards in a lidded box. If you plan to display the cards later, tell students who do not want their card displayed to fold it in half before placing it in the box. Finish this project with a time of worship together in which the box of postcard confessions is placed in the center of the worship space as an offering. Invite youth to reflect on the experience of confession

and finish with an assurance of God's unbounded, unconditional love for all. Close by sharing [Romans 8: 38-39](#) which declares that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

PALM SUNDAY BIBLE STUDY

Invide your youth to explore the meaning behind the gospel narratives of Palm Sunday with this interactive Bible study.

Scripture focus: John 12: 12-19



Learning Objectives:

Youth will compare the four versions of the “Palm Sunday” study in scripture.
Youth will discuss the significance of this story in Christian tradition.
Youth will present their own updated version of the story.

Getting Ready - Invite students to ponder the following questions in groups of three or four, then bring everyone together to report their responses and write them on a flip chart or white board: What sort of welcome do you think you would get if you were the President arriving for a visit here in our town? What would it be like when you arrive? Who would be there? How do you think you would be treated? (Convoy of limos? Red carpet? Lots of media?) How would you feel being the center of attention like that?

Digging In: Introduce any random video clip that portrays Jesus entering Jerusalem as part of the Palm Sunday narrative. This could be from an animated cartoon or any of the many films made about Jesus' life. Mention to youth that the challenge in presenting any sort of animated, film, or dramatic version of this event is that the story appears in all four gospels and each tells it a little differently. If you were to make a movie of this scene, you would have to decide which details are most important to include.

Divide youth into teams and have each team explore one of the four gospel versions of the Palm Sunday narrative. Next, have each group report the basic details of their version and note these details on the flip chart or white board. Invite youth to notice the differences or similarities between the different versions. For example, the Gospels don't all agree on what sort of branches the people were waving. Mark, Luke and Matthew all include the people shouting "Hosanna...." which is actually a quote lifted from Psalm 118. Some gospel writers mention details others don't include. It might be worth noting that, according to most mainline scholars, none of the gospel writers was likely to have been an eye witness to these events. The writers of Matthew and Luke had access to, and were copying from, Mark's earlier text. Each writer is penning their Palm Sunday narrative in a different time and place and writing for different audiences. They include details and ideas that they hoped would be meaningful for the people for whom they wrote.

Reflecting: Point out to the students one detail included in all versions: Jesus entering the city riding a small donkey or colt. Invite them to think back over your brainstorm

about how the President would be welcomed if s/he came to town. This is much the same way the Emperor would have been treated in Jesus' day. He likely would enter Jerusalem riding a warhorse or chariot, flanked by soldiers and banners. Ask: Why do you think the gospel narrative depict Jesus entering on a lowly donkey? Based on what you know about the people who were drawn to Jesus, who are the likely people welcoming him into Jerusalem? (Peasants? Lepers? Women? Children? Beggars?) What sort of message about the Kingdom of God do you think this way of entering the city sent to the people? If you were one of the gospel writers, why might you think this was the best way to tell the story?

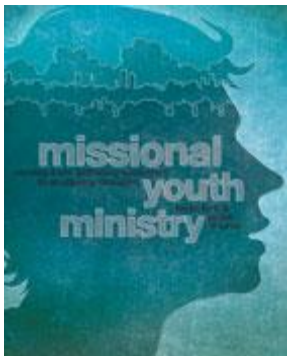
Next, divide youth once again into their smaller groups. Invite them to imagine they are going to make a modern-day movie update of this scene. What sort of transportation would Jesus use to ride into the city? Who would greet him? What would he be wearing? What might people be cheering instead of "Hosanna"? Challenge groups to depict their ideas in some creative way. They might want to work together to make a movie poster of the story or perhaps prepare a short improvised scene of their updated narrative. When groups are ready have them present their ideas to the others.

Closing: Despite the triumphalism that often accompanies Palm Sunday depictions in worship, the story reminds us that the Way of Christ often runs counter to the ways of popular culture and of those with power. Invite youth to prayerfully consider, as you head into Holy Week and the journey to the cross, how they might emulate Christ's humility and counter-culturalism in the days to come.

For more creative youth ministry ideas visit our [website](#) or follow us on [Twitter](#).

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Jacob and Brian's new book [Missional Youth Ministry: Moving from Gathering Teenagers to Scattering Disciples](#) will be published by Youth Specialties/Zondervan in April 2011. Their text makes a solid case for letting go of old activity-based paradigms in favor of youth ministry grounded in the essentials of prayer, worship, community, education, mission, and spirituality. It also provides many practical ideas for developing a ministry with youth focused on the mission of the Church, challenging youth to take seriously their own call to follow the way of Christ in the Church and the world.

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