

Beyond Fundraisers: Sane Ways to Fund Convention

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, choir 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, though. 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 the youth sponsors to pay their own way to convention. They already give up 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 of the cost each year.

If that isn't possible or if only a portion of the cost can be covered by the budget, have parents of the youth take turns organizing fundraisers. One couple could be in charge of the overall coordination of fundraisers. Put two sets of parents in charge of each fund-raising event. Another alternative is to appoint a fundraising committee of interested church members.

Also, consider how much each family could contribute toward the cost of convention. Families routinely play 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 congregation pay one third, the family one third and the youth group fundraisers contributing one third. Do what works in your context, but try to free the youth sponsors to do *ministry*.

Remember that raising money is not the primary purpose of youth group, so the youth group's *best* energies should *not* be spent there. There are ways to get our youth to convention without spending all our time raising money.

Finally, I'd like to encourage groups to examine the profitability of their fund-raisers. 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.

Ideas for Fundraisers

- Des Moines Mennonite makes and sells egg rolls every year. Your church might have a specialty or ethnic food to make and sell to co-workers and locals. West Union's variation on this is to sell casseroles in three sizes. Kalona Mennonite takes orders for pizzas and delivers them ready to bake. A church in Illinois takes orders for subs.
- Meals: Hog Roast, Taco Meal, Potato Bar, Breakfast, Fried Mush, Spaghetti, Chili, Pizza, Soup, etc. Consider serving a meal in connection with another, existing event to draw a larger crowd or make it convenient for families to attend.
- Formal Banquet: Valentine, Christmas, Dinner Theater. Charge \$20 or more per ticket.
- Sell pop, coffee and/or donuts between church and Sunday School. (Make sure your church council and custodian approve!)
- Give every household a two-liter bottle of pop. Ask them to collect their change in the empty bottle and bring it back after a period of months for the youth group.
- Concessions at university arena games or local festivals; clean-up arena after university sport events.
- Auction; Yard/Garage Sale
- Sell products through an existing company. You can do a search on the web for fund-raiser ideas. One such idea is to sell Krispy Kreme donuts. See www.krispykreme.com.