

The Whimsy Principle

NCNC Church Day

College Avenue United Church of Christ
Modesto, California
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"I Love Church!"

Creating an optimum church experience for young people requires two essential components:

1. **Ministry**
2. **Programming**

Ministry vs. Programming

Successful ministries are concerned with creating meaningful relationships between caring adults and young people. They also provide young people with a sense of belonging, uniquely connected to their peers.

Successful programs are concerned with utilizing dynamic, radically creative curriculum, environments, and teaching strategies to inspire young people on their journey of spiritual formation.

Church Math 301

Creative Programming - Caring Adult Relationships =
"Church is entertaining, but I don't feel connected."
[Often symptoms of mega-church youth groups]

Caring Adult Relationships - Creative Programming =
"Church is boring, but I like Pastor Sue."
[Often symptoms of small church youth groups]

Creative Programming + Caring Adult Relationships =
"Church is exciting and I feel at home there."
[Optimum church experience]

"Why Creative Programming?"

"Help! I work in a small congregation with no programming budget, very little available time, a limited volunteer pool and just a few young people. Isn't it enough just to have Caring Adult Relationships without Creative Programming?"

Church Math 101

Whimsy - Relationships =
Entertainment without relevance

Relationships - Whimsy =
Mentorship without excitement

Relationships + Whimsy =
Committed connection to both the mentor and the church

Rob's Whimsy Principle

"If it's not creative, it won't work."

Note that the principle doesn't read "If it IS creative, it WILL work."

Creativity doesn't guarantee success. But non-creativity guarantees failure.

Jesus

Jesus understood the importance of whimsy:

He told 18 unique parables to capture the attention of his audience and to creatively explain complex theology.

The Catholic Church

The early Catholic Church understood the importance of whimsy:

They used

- Stained-glass windows
- Statues
- Frescos
- Commissioned paintings

to communicate scripture and theology.

Albert Einstein

Albert Einstein understood the importance of whimsy:

"Imagination is more important than knowledge."

He believed knowledge shows you where you were, imagination, where you're going.

Walt Disney

Walt Disney understood the importance of whimsy:

"Part of the Disney success is our ability to create a believable world of dreams that appeals to all age groups."

"Disneyland has the imagination and the feeling of happy excitement that I knew as a kid."

"Fantasy and reality often overlap."

College Avenue UCC

College Avenue United Church of Christ understands the importance of whimsy:

- Children's Ministry Program (Sunday Adventure!)
- Youth Ministry Program (U-Nite!)
- LGBT Youth Support Program (The PLACE!)
- Fundraisers

You!

How have you been affected by whimsy (or a lack of whimsy) in church-related programming?

How?

How can congregations use whimsy to breathe life into established programming?

- Know where you're at.
- Target growth areas.
- Become Whimsy Builders.
- Create a plan.
- Do it.

1. Know Where You're At!

Assess how whimsical your programming already is.

- Does it excite you?
- Do you witness young people get excited about it?
- Do you witness volunteers get excited?
- Would the congregation ever use the word "creative" to describe programs for young people at your church?

2. Target Growth Areas

Which area(s) of your programming could use an injection of whimsy to get things moving?

- Games
- Curriculum
- Meeting Space
- Fundraisers
- Special Events/Activities

3. Become Whimsy Builders

Bring a mixed group of people together that are either creative (artists, contractors, wood-workers, seamstresses, thespians, etc.) or effective at working with young people.

Once together, generate ideas (no matter how off-the-wall or costly) about how to inject more whimsy into your program.

“Of all the things I’ve done, the most vital is coordinating the talents of those who work for us and pointing them toward a certain goal.”

— Walt Disney

4. Create a Plan

Narrow down your ideas into something that will work. Even invite feedback from young people.

If your Whimsy Builders decided that meetings should be held in a tree-house, plan how you can transform your meeting space into a tree-house interior.

- Acquire permission from your congregational governing board.
- Acquire space.
- Acquire funds.
- Acquire volunteers.

5. Do it!

“Jump and the net will appear.”

— Robin Crow

Every project I’ve begun, I have seen how God, the spirit of creativity, works in and through the project. *Things just start working.* If I’m flexible and aware enough, new ideas spring up and the project becomes all the more elaborate and excellent.

Notes on Whimsy

- **Whimsy is subjective.**

What is whimsical today may not be whimsical tomorrow. Stay fluid, flexible and dynamic.

“Disneyland is something that will never be finished. It is something that I can keep developing and adding to.”

—Walt Disney

- **Whimsy is time-consuming.**

Be prepared to work long and hard. But know your young people will interpret your investment as an investment in them—they will take your time-spent personally.

Notes on Whimsy

- **Whimsy can cost \$\$\$.**

I’ve found that once a congregation sees how whimsy can transform a program, they are willing to invest in the principle. Until then, use whimsy to pull off some amazing fundraisers.

- **Whimsy takes a team.**

Be gentle in throwing out someone’s creative ideas. In the film industry, this process is called “killing the baby.” Our ideas are our children—even the ugly ones—and we protect them like mother bears. Keep your team together at all costs. You can’t do this alone.

Notes on Whimsy

- **Whimsy demands risk-taking.**

Any time we pursue a creative idea, we take a risk. This gives us an opportunity to trust that God really is working for our good, especially when we take risks in the name of love.

- **Whimsy is addictive.**

Once you start seeing your world through a pair of whimsy-colored glasses, you won't want to go back. It's technicolor Oz compared to a grayscale Kansas. You will wonder how you ever managed without whimsy as a spiritual imperative.

Wise Words

“Trust that still, small voice that says: this might work, and I'll try it.”

— Diane Mariechild

“All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them.”

— Walt Disney

“Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakens.”

— Carl Jung

Resources

- ***The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron**

Cameron offers a systematic process for cracking open our creative minds, helping us to see that spirituality and creativity are inseparably intertwined.

- ***Disneyland, Anaheim, California***

Take a field trip down south to see how Disney uses whimsy to inspire and unite strangers. I believe theme parks are sanctuaries.

The Whimsy Principle

USING RADICAL CREATIVITY TO GROW STUDENT MINISTRY PROGRAMS

WHIMSY

- I believe whimsy _____.
- If our program had more whimsy, it would _____.
- A fear I have about incorporating more whimsy is _____.

1. KNOW WHERE YOU'RE AT

- At my congregation, _____ is a component to our program that excites me.
- To his/her friends, a young person would describe our program as _____.
- The congregation would describe our program as _____.
- The whimsy level of our program is _____.

2. TARGET GROWTH AREAS

- To his/her friends, a young person would describe the **Games/Activities** component to our program as _____.
- A young person would describe the program's **Meeting Space** as _____.
- A young person would describe the **Curriculum** to our program as _____.
- A young person would describe our program's **Special Events** as _____.
- A young person would describe our program's **Fundraisers** as _____.
- _____ is the program component into which injecting more whimsy would have an immediate effect.

3. BECOME A TEAM OF WHIMSY BUILDERS

- _____ are two people in our congregation who are skilled in and passionate about **building things with wood and power tools**.
- _____ are two people in our congregation who are skilled in and passionate about **sewing and textiles**.
- _____ are two people in our congregation who are skilled in and passionate about **painting and visual arts**.
- _____ are two people in our congregation who are skilled in and passionate about **digital art and graphic design**.
- _____ are two people in our congregation who are skilled in and passionate about **dance and movement**.
- _____ are two people in our congregation who are skilled in and passionate about **theater arts**.
- _____ are two people in our congregation who are skilled in and passionate about **music and playing contemporary instruments**.
- _____ are two people in our congregation who are skilled in and passionate about **creative writing**.
- _____ are two people in our congregation who are skilled in and passionate about **working with young people**.
- I am skilled and passionate about _____.

4. CREATE A PLAN

- If I had unlimited financing, time, and other resources, I would inject whimsy into our program by _____.
- I would also _____.
- But especially, I would improve _____.

5. DO IT

- To successfully implement more whimsy into our program, I need _____.
- But especially, I need _____.