

# The One Thing Model

## Description

The One Thing Model for youth and young adult ministry describes frequency rather than priority. For example, a congregation might have a “Youth Day” for the church service once a year and consider it to fulfill the youth ministry needs for a year. A church may have a token young adult on its church board and call that “listening to our young adults.”

But don’t expect anything more than that one thing! Don’t ask for funding or a room in which to meet or a focused outreach in the community. In one way or another, the message comes through, “You already have your one thing!”

If asked whether or not the church has a youth or young adult ministry, many would nod in the affirmative, certain that the base has been covered adequately.

This unspoken model seems common in a family setting or a small church with few or no youth. The church may do no more than one thing either because it doesn’t need to or doesn’t want to or it doesn’t have the resources to do more than one thing. Perhaps the congregation’s resources enable it to have a consistent Pathfinder Club or a weekly AY program, but nothing more. Small churches don’t necessarily have a comprehensive program 24/7. In fact, having one thing a week might be a bit of a stretch.

A congregation that has no young people often sees no need to do anything for young people since they aren’t present. When asked

to consider the future of their church, some passively send the church to its grave since the senior citizens are headed that direction anyway. They find that easier than trying to stir up things or make the changes to attract youth or young adults to their existing church. An annual youth event might release any guilt associated with such irresponsibility or lack of mission.

It’s possible that a church might have such great integration among its members and in the community that it needs no separate youth or young adult ministry.

## Critique

Let’s be clear—the One Thing Model does include one thing! That’s more than many churches offer! It can be a galvanizing point for the church as well as its young people and those in the community. Many adults can reference a single event or a consistent “one thing” that brought them to Christ and grew them in discipleship. Frequently those are the people who pass it on by providing something in their church when they are adults.

When a church provides one thing, that usually means one person leading one thing. With those conditions, the one person's influence, style and interactions will be less than a team or a multi-faceted approach would have. When the youth leader of a small group is the parent of both youth, you simply have a home youth group. By the time of adolescence, most are looking for additional input beyond the foundation laid by the family.

One thing misses many other possibilities. For example, if Pathfinders captivates the outdoorsy types of young people, what about the computer geeks or the academics? If Bible Bowl nurtures the Bible trivia kids, what's available for those who flourish with freedom outside of highly structured events? If you have only one arrow in your quiver, you'd better be a very good archer with your one shot.

## **Possibilities**

Celebrate what is, rather than bemoaning what isn't. One is more than zero! If you have just one thing for youth or young adults at your church, you'll want to prioritize to make the one a very good selection. You'll need to take inventory of what you have in terms of people, resources, target group, and needs. Consider your mission. What about the future in the short term and in the long term? What about right now?

Some churches go through cycles in which they have a group of children that progress as a cohort through different stages in the church. You might have 5-12 children in your church who mature into youth group age. But when they graduate from that, what young adult ministry will they lead or co-lead? And what will happen to your youth group when they leave?

The One Thing Model could become a rut that merely repeats on an annual basis. Or it can be alive and expectant of renewal, change, growth, relevance, and a newness every time.

A church that integrates youth and young adults into its body for a whole church experience can still provide a limited amount of age-specific opportunities, just as it might do a women's retreat, a Valentine's banquet, a letter-to-soldiers campaign, or a weekly day care for MOPS (Mothers Of Pre-Schoolers). A One Thing Model can change its "one thing" as needed.