



Extreme Activities

Eric, a youth pastor, who had engaged in a variety of extreme sports while in college, decided it would be fun to have the youth, as a lesson in trust, rappel off of the three-story church building. He found his rappelling gear, secretly planned the event and when the youth showed up for youth group, he was on the top of the building. He delivered a challenge to the youth and asked if they trusted him. Those who did were to come up to the roof and meet the challenge.

About half of the youth went to the roof while the rest remained on the ground. Eric asked for volunteers from the group on the roof. Nick, a 16-year-old was the first to step forward. Eric gave Nick instructions, put on the helmet, strapped him in and told him to go over the side of the building. Nick hesitated but climbed over the building. As a volunteer on the ground held the line, Nick began his descent. About halfway down, Nick got extremely nervous and started twisting and turning. He panicked and in an instant the line snapped and Nick fell backwards to the ground.

Nick is now a paraplegic. He will not walk again. An investigation showed that the line being used was old and worn. Besides faulty equipment, numerous other commonly accepted safeguards were not followed. Eric lost his job as youth director. The group has not been the same since.

Many churches are doing what they can to reach out and attract young people to their churches and youth activities. They are engaging in paint-balling, climbing, rappelling, hang-gliding, skateboarding and anything else that will attract young people. Doing so is not all bad. The method in which some youth leaders and churches are doing so is the bigger question. What are the issues?

Communicate

Sometimes, only after an activity, are church leaders aware that an extreme activity took place. They either hear about it, or

worse yet, something bad happens. To make sure everyone is on the same page, communication is critical. Set procedures should be in writing, indicating the correct steps necessary to engage in any activity that has the potential to cause injury. Getting approval from the right person or committee will begin the communication process.

Plan

Any time a church is planning on an activity that is outside its normal scope of ministry, extra planning is needed. Writing up a plan that addresses safety, equipment, training, supervision, transportation and any other aspect of the event should take place with a ministry team. The more extreme the event, the more planning that should take place.

Insurance

Many churches assume that their insurance will cover any event they engage in. This is simply not true. Early in the planning stage, the church's program administrator should be contacted. Some insurance policies exclude coverage for certain activities. If this is the case, it is better to know early on, so an alternate activity can be planned or adequate insurance coverage may be obtained from an alternate source.



★ Ministry Protection Memo ★
“MPM” is a series on various topics relative to Church and safety. Send your comments and interests to AME Zion’s Director of Ministry Protection.

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Permission/Consent To Treat

Not all parents wish their child to participate in all activities. This may be for health or safety reasons. Parents have the right to know and the responsibility to allow or deny their child participation. They can only do so if they clearly understand, in detail, what the event will entail. Therefore, permission slips should be required for any extreme activity.

In addition, a standard signed “consent to treat a minor” form should be in place for every participant. A health information and consent form can cut minutes or even hours off of getting proper treatment.

Training

Skilled and qualified trainers should be engaged for extreme activities. They know the hazards and the safeguards. They will know the safety issues and are in the best position to train youth leaders and participants. Further, if they are from a company that is providing the activity (paint-balling, hay ride, climbing), they also should have insurance coverage. Remember to request a certificate of insurance from the vendor during your planning stages.

Every participant should be trained in the activity prior to engagement. Each member should be required to affirm that they heard and understood the directions. Let every participant know that they will be required to follow the instructions of the trained leaders at all times or they will be removed from the activity.

Equipment

Prior to any and every event, equipment and the area of activity should be inspected. Make sure you have proper safety equipment for every participant. Any damaged or questionable equipment should be marked and set aside or disposed of. Any hazards in the activity areas should be removed or clearly marked.



Emergency Preparation

Despite your best planning and efforts, sometimes small or large injuries do occur. Therefore, it is essential that you plan for them. Having a sufficient first-aid kit for the specific activity is important. Also, having immediate access to a phone or communication device to summon help from beyond your group could save a person’s life. Know where the nearest hospital is and how to get help. Also, know exactly where you are at all times so you can get help quickly should it be needed.

Conclusion

With the increase of extreme activities within youth groups, every youth leader should think about how critical safety is. Engaging in an activity knowing that every precaution has been taken to prevent an accident will not only protect members of the group, but also the entire ministry of the church.

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

Communicate

- Written procedures
- Proper approvals

Plan—written plan that addresses

- Safety
- Equipment
- Training
- Supervision
- Transportation

Insurance

- Check to see if your extreme activities are a covered event

Permission/Consent To Treat

- Do parents allow their children to participate?
- Permission slip signed and on file
- Health information—consent to treat form completed and taken on activity

Training

- All supervisors to be trained on activity
- Participants need to know the ground rules

Equipment

- Inspect equipment
- Inspect areas

Emergency Preparation

- Do you have a plan
- First aid kit
- Home/Contact phone numbers of participants

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