

*Unite the leaders.
Reach the youth.*

A how-to guide for youth leader unity in your area

shiningLIGHTS
TRUST
Bringing INNOVATION to outreach



Resource prepared by
Shining Lights Trust



Unite the leaders to reach the youth

A HOW-TO
GUIDE FOR YOUTH
LEADER UNITY IN
YOUR AREA

WHAT'S INSIDE THIS GUIDE

This is a practical guide to help youth leaders build meaningful unity in their town or city, so you make a greater impact.

This is about moving from connection to collaboration.

CONTENT:

- 1. Foundations for Unity**
– *Why we're already united – and why that matters.*
- 2. The life stages of a Unity Group**
– *From coffee to mission-focused partnership*
- 3. How to build a healthy Unity Culture**
– *The boundaries that enable sustainability*
- 4. Three key areas to apply Youth Unity:**
 - (i) Equipping** – *Empowering Youth to Share their Faith*
 - (ii) Schools** – *Where the Mission Starts*
 - (iii) Events** – *Momentum Builders*

Introduction

THE GOAL

This guide is about helping youth leaders unite behind a vision – that every youth in Aotearoa-New Zealand have opportunity to encounter the love, hope and teachings of Jesus through a conversation with or invitation from a friend.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The Bible calls our time in history the “age of the Church” and the “age of the Spirit.” It’s a specific season – and it won’t last forever. God’s desire is that none should perish, but all come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). That’s the heart behind the mission Jesus gave us: “Go and make disciples of all nations... baptising them... and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19–20)

This Great Commission defines the Church’s mission – and is the mission of:

- Every local church
- Every Christian individual
- Every small group
- Every Christian family
- And also of the united Church, as leaders come together.



**BIBLICAL UNITY:
CLEAR. SIMPLE. ESSENTIAL.**



Foundations for unity

WHY WE'RE ALREADY UNITED, AND WHY THAT MATTERS

A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

According to Ephesians 4:4-6, Christian believers are already united without even needing to meet – having one Lord, one faith, one baptism. This unity is based in our shared beliefs, values, and life in Christ – not in gatherings or relationships. It's not something we achieve. It is in something we live out.



FROM THE BIBLE: WHY GATHER?

We gather to achieve together that we might not achieve apart.

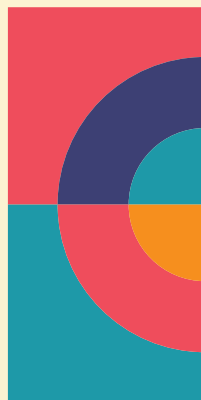
Philippians 1:27 reflects the way the Philippian Church's unity could enable them to stand firm and strive for the gospel – where they otherwise might not. Paul knew their unity would produce courage and resilience in the face of opposition.

Coming together isn't just symbolic. It's about seeing and doing what we couldn't do alone.

Philippians 1:27 says... *"Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel..."*

Jesus' prayer in John 17 reflects the very same thinking. Jesus prays for our unity not as an end in itself, but "so that the world may know". Unity wasn't the final goal. It was a part of the pathway toward achieving the goal.

While unity pleases God (Psalm 133), its purpose down here is mission.



A LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVE

A challenge in Christian unity gatherings is balancing relationships with wider purpose.

Relationships are a necessary foundation because trust is needed to work together.

The danger is that these relationships inadvertently become the only focus of the goal.

In leadership, *"It's always about relationship – and it's always about vision."*

- Some groups might focus only on connection.
- Others might care only about results.
- Healthy unity holds both together.

A tip: Creating regular open spaces, and with food, helps!

Consider starting each school term with a simple Saturday breakfast at a home together – like bacon and eggs, hashbrowns and mushrooms, coffee and juice. This creates a reliable pattern that can outlast you – and in an environment free from the interruptions and constraints of a public café.



A private location like a home or church lounge allows for more open conversation, engaged prayer and encouraging outcomes – in contrast to a café.

A HIDDEN BENEFIT

Strong relationships between youth leaders encourages and helps leaders stay in their roles longer.





The life stages of a unity group

*A natural process –
from relationship, to prayer,
to action.*



Stage 1: Coffee Unity – *Get to know each other*

Meet, share, encourage, and build trust. Relationships are the foundation.

Stage 2: Prayer Unity – *Pray bigger*

Move beyond your own needs – pray for your city, school, or context – bringing identified needs to God and uniting around a common hope.

Stage 3: Functional Unity – *Act together*

As trust and vision grow, ask:

“What can we do together that we cannot do apart?” This is where unity becomes mission-in-motion.

IN SUMMARY:

- Relationship (Coffee)
- Prayer (Vision)
- Action (Missional application)

KEY QUESTION:

What could you achieve together for your mission that you couldn't achieve apart?





How to build a healthy unity CULTURE

THE BOUNDARIES THAT ENABLE
SUSTAINABILITY

*Things move at the
speed of trust*



DEFINING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES FOR UNITY

Boundaries are important because, where they are broken, trust is undermined.

BOUNDARY 1: THE GROUP HAS AN AGENDA

This boundary is important because it is often missed out amongst the challenge and enjoyment of pulling everyone together relationally.

The agenda is to pursue God's mission for his Church in your city wherever individual churches or youth groups may be lacking.

Is every young person having opportunity to hear of and know Christ?

BOUNDARY 2: THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH INDEPENDENCE

The independence of each group and leader isn't wrong. Independence is a function of MATURITY, not immaturity. It is good that groups work independently where they can.

Larger youth groups will naturally do bigger things by themselves than smaller groups. This is not to be criticised.

The question is specific: What could you do together in service to your mission that you could not do apart?



BOUNDARY 3: "WE DON'T ALL HAVE TO"

Unlike a local church with a structured leadership team (elders and deacons, 1 Timothy 3:1-13), the united Church has no God-appointed leadership structure.

Leadership in the united Church is almost exactly like in Israel during the Judges, where God was King and raised up leaders as needed (like Deborah, Ehud, Samson, Gideon, and Jephthah). Jesus is our King!

- **'We don't all have to':** Just because some churches unite for a project, it doesn't mean that everyone must. Those who don't join aren't causing disunity. Unity is always voluntary.
- **A caution:** If this boundary is ignored, those who feel judged may withdraw their support and attendance.
- **To be aware:** Not every unity idea will be embraced by all. Most efforts only need a few churches to succeed anyway.

By understanding these boundaries a Christian leader is helped to speak well of others (Ephesians 4:29, James 1:19) and will be less inclined to judge too quickly (Matthew 7:1-5).

This protects the health of our unity.

SUMMARY

Boundaries are essential to health. Without them, trust will be undermined. With them, united endeavour can flourish.





ORGANISATIONAL TIP: When planning events, try to shift as much of the organisation OUT of your combined meetings as possible.

- If you only meet 4 or 8 times in a year, avoid spending that time on details.
- Let subgroups do event planning.
- Protect your limited times together for relationship-building, prayer and discussing your over-arching vision.

LET'S NOW GET PRACTICAL:

HERE IS WHERE YOUR UNITY CAN MAKE THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE!





Three key areas to apply youth unity

*Three common gaps
that can become
shared opportunities*



Youth outreach in New Zealand often suffers from weakness in the following three areas.

These are identifiable 'gaps' that united youth leaders of each city and town could 'plug'.

All three areas relate to the witness of our youth to their friends.

- **Equipping** – *Empowering Youth to Share Their Faith*
- **Schools** – *Where the Mission Starts*
- **Events** – *Momentum Builders*

(i) EQUIPPING – Empowering youth to share their faith

Many young people don't know how to talk about their faith with friends because they've never been equipped.

Without this equipping, outreach is left to rely on attractive events rather than meaningful conversations.

A notably greater impact results when youth are confident to engage their friends in conversation.

- **More visitors:** When talking with friends, they naturally invite them to visit a youth group or youth events and those invited are more ready to come.
- **More responsiveness:** When they arrive, their hearts are more prepared and responsive.
- **Longer-lasting results:** After visiting, conversations naturally continue because a culture of talking about spiritual things had already been established beforehand.



The challenge? Many leaders haven't been shown how to equip youth for this.

A bigger picture: Because the average youth leader is in their role only about two years, if this isn't a united goal, it is unlikely to happen.

The opportunity? Within a generation this situation could be changed. All that is needed at any point is for the current generation of youth leaders to set a new pattern.

A SIMPLE GOAL: OUTREACH EQUIPPING IN EVERY YOUTH MINISTRY, EVERY YEAR.

Key Areas to Teach:

1. **Gospel Skills** – How to explain the message of Jesus clearly
2. **Conversational Skills** – Asking good questions that open spiritual doors
3. **Storytelling Skills** – Sharing testimonies of other evidences in a way that connects
4. **Teamwork & Invitation** – Working together and inviting others in



FAQ: WHAT IF HALF MY GROUP AREN'T CHRISTIANS?

Do your equipping anyway!

- **Gospel Skills:** It's okay for everyone to learn how to explain the Christian faith – just like we can also learn about what others believe.
- **Conversation Skills:** Everyone benefits from learning how to have deeper, meaningful conversations.
- **Testimony Skills:** Everyone can learn to tell stories that reflect truth – even before they fully believe it.

In the process, some non-Christian youth may actually come to faith!



Resources for Outreach Equipping

- Godtalk.nz – Free NZ-made series of 5-minute videos, with discussion questions including role plays purposed to build gospel, conversational, and storytelling skills.
- Dare2Share.org – A resource focused on gospel-sharing skills.
- In-Person Training – Ministries like Word of Life, Scripture Union, UNASHAMED, Catalyst, and For This City offer hands-on outreach equipping. Many denominations also have trainers available.

(ii) SCHOOLS – Where the mission starts

When Christian youth unite in their schools they become stronger in faith and bolder in witness.

As a pattern, conversations that start in schools then finish in youth groups. This highlights the important place of Christian unity in schools.



WHY SCHOOL UNITY MATTERS – SUMMARISED:

- Christian youth grow stronger, compromising less
- They become bolder in witness
- They invite more friends to youth group
- Friends become more curious about Jesus
- When the gospel is shared – friends are more ready to respond

In short:

- School is the seedbed. Youth unity enables boldness that waters the seeds. Youth groups then reap the fruit.
- That's why the unity of Christian youth in schools is strategic and needed.



Resources for school groups

- Catalystmovement.com encourages school groups and has an online 'Jesus Clubs Training Manual'
- Godtalk.nz/schools encourages school groups and personal witness through practical free online resources and a monthly e-update
- A "101 Ideas for Schools" magazine from a school-group movement in Europe is preserved at Godtalk.nz/101-ideas-for-schools

(iii) EVENTS – Momentum builders

Big moments move youth forwards.

United outreach and social events create energy and excitement – and this helps.

- They draw more friends than regular youth nights
- They build buzz around Christian youth ministry
- They give spiritually curious teens a natural next step
- They can benefit every group involved.

When youth are already having faith conversations at school, these events can be the next step on their journey.



Event Ideas to Get You Started

This list could be endless. Here are a few ideas to spark inspiration:

- Volleyball comp + invite to a follow-up event
- Five-a-side soccer tournament
- Gospel concert with music, testimonies, and a speaker
- Worship night with a short message and prayer (ideal for believers)
- Raft race or outdoor team challenge
- World Vision 40 Hour Challenge event

Let creativity lead the way. Be welcoming and purposeful.

IN SUMMARY

Facilitating unity is about balancing both **relationship** and **vision**. Neglect either and the momentum will fade.

What is the wider goal?

Consider this as a vision statement:

To ensure every young person encounters the love, hope, and teachings of Jesus through a conversation with or invitation from a friend.



YOUR KEY QUESTION TOGETHER:

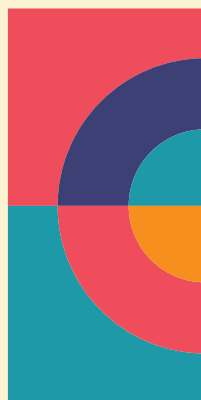
What could we achieve together in service to our God-given mission that we could not achieve apart?

Three areas to consider:

- (i) **Equipping** – Prepare youth to share their faith.
- (ii) **Schools** – Help youth unite for prayer and mission.
- (iii) **Events** – Create momentum by giving youth events they can invite their friends to.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is the primary purpose of a united group of Christian leaders, beyond trust?
- Is independence wrong? Why or why not?
- What are the key stages in the life of a unity group, and why is each important?
- What is our mission in our city/town? What could we achieve together that we might not achieve alone?
- What could we now do in the following areas?
 - » **Equipping:** *Will we prioritise outreach equipping and make it an annual focus?*
 - » **Schools:** *Will we encourage youth to unite in prayer and mission at their schools?*
 - » **Events:** *Will we organise combined outreach events to build momentum and attract new visitors?*



END NOTES – A LONGER-TERM VISION:



REGIONAL & NATIONAL CHRISTIAN TALENT QUEST

The idea of a regional gospel talent quest is about using the creative arts for the gospel. It's a powerful tool that New Zealand youth ministry once thrived on – but lost.

History: The **Capital Teen Convention** ran for 30 years, with regional finalists competing in Wellington. It brought Christian creative arts to the forefront, opening doors in culture. Unfortunately, the vision faded around 2000, and with it, a key national youth leader network.

BENEFITS:

- Groups could perform items practiced at multiple events, from youth gatherings to schools.
- Music, dance, spoken word, and more can capture attention and communicate a powerful message.
- Everything benefits as a result – the youth, the audience, and the gospel.

For more, check out a draft manual at Godtalk.nz/talentquest/. This manual exists to preserve an idea and share a vision.

What could you do locally to help your youth use the creative arts in gospel communication?



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