

MESSY GAMES – The Rev'd. Matthew Sponagle

Sports, Fitness & Games panel presentation

Sept. 30, 2016

I shared three stories of how using games, particularly messy games, have been effective at youth ministry.

- In the first story, a young man helped to establish a youth group
- In the second story, an atheist teenager was invited to play messy games by a friend, went to church camp and was later baptized.
- In the final story, my current effort to start connecting with youth at our only youth event in the parish by initiating a messy game with one teenager and already have more interested in joining next year- hoping to launch a youth group from this event.

So, what have I learned that I can share with you?

- Slime is my thing, but there are other things that work. – other things that have helped create relationship in these youth contexts included board games (apples to apples, cards against humanity,) card games, spoons, sports, water fights/relays.

- Look on-line for game ideas and make adjustments. Watch videos to see how participants and spectators react to see if it is going to be an effective event. Find fun and engaging things. Jimmy Fallon's games with celebrities, is a great resource, but too adult sometimes for a youth context.

- If you do messy games, experiment first. Some things hurt the eyes (Borax is common in some slime recipes, Shaving cream), stick to hair (flour), smell bad (oatmeal, mustard.) Some things stain, some things do not clean up easily. I now use a food thickener, "Thicken Up" to thicken water and add children's fingerprint for colour. Easy wash up, and dries up on the ground in the sun.

- Be thoughtful about what you post on-line. I had a bad experience after I put a video on youtube where inappropriate comments were made. I post things in closed groups, let people tag themselves if they want. Make sure you have permission to put things on-line, and don't post anything that would embarrass someone. When it comes to the internet the saying is true, you can't unring a bell.

2 major benefits from playing games:

- Build relationships. Follow up with folks, like contacting them about sharing pictures, see if they had a good time, would they want to do it again, would they like to bring a friend. Relationship can lead to questions down the road. Kids from youth group stay in touch via facebook. May not attend church, but are exploring and inquiring. We are planting seeds.
- I think it made me more approachable.

I wanted to conclude with a quote I gathered this week from

one of the girls from camp: "Being a shy person at camp during the games in the beginning you don't have the option not to open up a little, camp taught me a lot of life lessons and I built incredible bonds with many people who are my best friends today. By the Thursday games no one had anything to hide, we all felt like family which is crazy because we had only met each other on Monday. Going to camp my first year I really didn't believe in religion and by the time I was a counsellor 5 years later, I believe, I don't practice as much as some but I believe what the camp has taught over the years. Camp has taught me a lot about forgiveness and how to move on from certain situations I never thought I could."