

RECREATIONAL THEOLOGY

Crazy, gross games are often associated with Youth Ministry and are assumed to be a requirement to ensure participation of lots of youth. However, many adults and youth dislike games, finding them at best uncomfortable and at worst exclusionary.

What if we refocus the purpose of games, turning them into powerful tools of “Recreational Theology” where they can be instrumental in helping participants get to know one another by focusing on scripture through physical activities, and by assisting in examination of oneself and the world around them.

Recreational Theology can take a game and recreate it into an activity that actually serves as a resource in building community and strengthening confidence. In addition to breaking the ice with a new group or to change the pace, these activities can help open the door to deeper conversations and contemplation among participants.

The effectiveness of any game lies largely on the preparedness of the facilitator(s) before the game, during the game, and the processing of the “game” through a theological lens. Simple questions such as.:

- What did you think when I asked you to do this activity?
- How did you feel as you were doing this activity?

- How does this activity relate to _____ (our mission, Happening, serving God, working together, etc)?
- What can you take away from this experience that can help us serve God more authentically?

Helping to connect the activity to the mission experience is crucial. It is the processing of the activity that helps stimulate the mind and the heart. Taking time to recognize the impact of the activity and how God might be speaking to us will stay with the participants long after the “game” is over.

Cultural Sensitivity Activity: The United Nations Responds to Benoko

As you prepare your group for their mission experience, it is extremely important for your group to discuss and examine the impact this experience might have on the hosting community. Our intentions may be well intended, but often our actions can cause misunderstandings, hurt, and even anger.

In the exercise below, explain to the whole group that they will be divided into two smaller groups of 10–15 individuals each, with one group representing a country under great economic and social distress and the other group representing the United Nations. (If your group is more than 30, divide them into four groups, with groups 1 and 3 being the same

country and 2 and 4 being the other country.) There is one thing that group one knows that group two does not know—(you are telling group one to give group two to be annoyed at Western arrogance and suspicious of offers of help) – this is unclear.

Hand out the two group scenarios to the groups, giving each group 10–20 minutes to discuss how they would like to prepare for the meeting of one another. The United Nations group should appoint a 5 or 6 person delegation and the Benoko group should select a council of King or Queen and 4 or 5 close advisors. Then the United Nations delegation should present their proposal to the ? (Invite all participants to observe the interactions between the two groups.) Allow 20 minutes or more for this interaction, then follow-up with questions listed at the bottom of this sheet.

Group 1:

You are from the beautiful island of Benoko, some one hundred and fifty miles off the coast of Africa. Your country has been run by King/Queen _____ and his/her ancestors for the last 175 years; the people of Benoko are quite proud of their island's traditions. In the early 1900s, Benoka's beautiful port of Simpalo was on a favorite tourist route between the East and West, but airline travel has almost put it out of business. At one time the Benokan people lived a life of comfort, profiting from the exotic fish industry. However, over the last twenty years, there has been a warming of climates and waters, significantly reducing

the number of fish caught off the coast. The poverty level of the general population has more than doubled, many residents are faced with starvation, and global warming threatens the very existence of the island. A delegation from the United Nations is coming to offer aid.

Your group should develop a plan for receiving this delegation, including what kind of help you want and are willing to take. You are aware that it is the industrialized nations whose air travel destroyed your tourist trade and whose carbon dioxide emissions have caused global warming.

Group 2:

You are a delegation of United Nations representatives sent to offer aid to the beautiful island of Benoko, some 150 miles off the coast of Africa. Benoko has been run by King/Queen _____ and his/her ancestors for the last 175 years; the people of Benoko are quite proud of their island's traditions. In the early 1900s, Benoka's beautiful port of Simpalo was on a favorite tourist route between the East and West, but airline travel has almost put it out of business. At one time the Benokan people lived a life of comfort and leisure, profiting from the exotic fish industry. However, over the last twenty years, there has been a warming of climates and waters, significantly reducing the number of fish caught off the coast. The poverty level of the general population has more than doubled, many residents are faced with starvation, and global warming threatens

the very existence of the island. Your group should develop a plan for helping Benoko, select a delegation of 5 or 6 people, then meet with Benoko's monarch and council to present this plan.

Follow-up Questions:

1. (to the Benoko group) What did it feel like when members of the United Nations came to offer help?
2. (to the UN group) How did you feel about the way the people of Benoko received you and your offers of help?
3. How might this exercise relate to our Mission Experience?

If you find these activities useful and productive, here are a few more links to a few of the many websites devoted to Initiative Activities.

Wilderdom

<http://www.wilderdom.com/games/InitiativeGames.html>

Outdoor Adventure Activities

<http://www.cwu.edu/~jefferis/unitplans/cooperativegames/>

Boy Scouts of America

<http://www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/Games.pdf>

CampSource

<http://campsource.pbworks.com/f/Initiative+Games.pdf>

VCU Initiative Games

<http://www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/Games.pdf>