

YOUTH BECOMING LEADERS

High School Christian Leadership and Global Transformation Institute

A DAY IN THE LIFE

OVERVIEW

Day in the Life is an interactive vocational discernment experience for high school students, but could be used in other settings as well. The activity introduces students to Christian leaders serving in youth ministry, college or student ministry, children's ministry, pastoral ministry, worship and music ministry, missions, and workplace or marketplace ministry.

It begins with a 45-minute moderated panel in which leaders share how they recognized and responded to God's call, describe the joys and challenges of their work, and offer an honest picture of a typical day in their vocation. Students then participate in two 45-minute small-group conversations, choosing topics that interest them or that they are curious about. These smaller conversations allow students to ask candid questions, hear personal stories, and explore how their own gifts and experiences might become part of God's work in the church and the world.

The activity concludes with gratitude and communal prayer, helping students recognize that Christian calling takes many forms and that every vocation can become a place of faithful witness and service.

Objectives:

1. Identify at least two ways that Christian calling can be expressed through ministry in the local church, educational settings, the workplace, and the wider community.
2. Reflect theologically on how Scripture, prayer, Christian community, personal gifts, and the needs of the world can help them discern God's call.
3. Formulate and ask meaningful questions of practicing Christian leaders and identify at least one vocational area or next step they would like to explore further.
4. Recognize how professional vocations within and outside of the church can serve as expressions of Christian ministry.

DETAILS

Set Up Time:

The recommended set-up time is 1 hour.

Allow approximately one hour before participants arrive to arrange the panel and small-group spaces, test microphones and presentation technology (if applicable), post vocational-area and rotation signs, distribute materials, and place water for the leaders. Participating ministry leaders should arrive 20–30 minutes before the activity begins for orientation, logistical instructions, and prayer.

Length of Activity Time:

The activity lasts about 2 ½ hours. Here is a suggested timeline:

- Welcome and introduction: 5 minutes
- Panel discussion: 45 minutes
- Transition to first small group: 5 minutes
- First small-group conversation: 40 minutes
- Transition to second small group: 5 minutes
- Second small-group conversation: 40 minutes
- Closing reflection, gratitude, and prayer: 10 minutes

For the second conversation, students form new groups, each exploring a different vocational area with a different leader.

Size Range of Group:

- 1 moderator
- 5-6 panelists
- 1 small group per panelist (6-8 students)

RESOURCES

Materials Needed:

- Microphones and sound system for facilitator and panelists, if needed
- Chairs for the panelists and moderator
- Chairs for participating students
- Clearly printed signs identifying each vocational area
- Name tags for ministry leaders, staff, and students
- Printed list of panel questions for the moderator and panelists
- Printed schedule and rotation instructions
- Student reflection or evaluation forms (in small groups and/or in the general program evaluation)
- Pens or pencils
- Student journals
- Bibles
- Timer or visible clock
- Water for panelists
- Thank-you cards/gifts for panelists

Before the activity, each participating leader/panelist should receive the group's working definition of vocation, the purpose of "Day in the Life," the students' age range, the schedule, and the questions they will be asked. If no working definition has been established, invite panelists to share their understanding of vocation during the conversation. Leaders should understand that this is not primarily a recruitment event or an opportunity to promote their organizations. Their role is to speak honestly about calling, Christian leadership, daily ministry, joys, challenges, failures, growth, and the practices that sustain them.

Leaders should also help students, whether in the panel discussion or through other conversations, to consider the calling all Christians share: to follow Christ and love God and neighbor. This shared calling shapes every aspect of life, with particular vocations offering distinct ways to live out Christian discipleship.

SPACE SET-UP

The activity should begin in a large meeting room where all students can see and hear the panel clearly. Place the moderator and ministry leaders at the front of the room in a semicircle or seated behind tables. Arrange student seating so that the atmosphere feels conversational rather than overly formal. Display each panelist's name, role, and ministry area on a screen or printed sign.

For the small-group portion, create a separate conversation area for each vocational category:

- Youth ministry
- College or student ministry
- Children's ministry
- Senior or lead pastoral ministry
- Worship and music ministry
- Workplace or marketplace ministry

If possible, spread the groups throughout one large room or use nearby breakout rooms so conversations don't compete with one another.

Each space should have a clearly visible sign and enough chairs for one or two leaders and approximately 6–12 students. Arrange chairs in a circle or around a table to encourage participation. Avoid classroom-style rows during the breakout sessions.

Announce the groups' rotation assignments before the panel begins and again after the panel discussion. These could also be printed or displayed on a screen. Students should know which area they will visit first and which area they will visit for their second rotation.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Preparation: Four to Eight Weeks Before the Activity

1. Reserve a large room for the panel and, if needed, nearby rooms for the small-group conversations.

2. Identify the vocational areas that will be represented. At minimum, seek leaders from youth ministry, college or student ministry, children's ministry, pastoral ministry, worship or music ministry, and workplace or marketplace ministry.

3. Invite one or two leaders from each area. Whenever possible, include leaders who represent different ages, cultural backgrounds, ministry contexts, denominational traditions, and vocational journeys. Assess each leader's suitability through trusted recommendations and a brief conversation about the discussion topics. Confirm sound judgment, age-appropriate communication, and alignment with the activity's purpose. Also establish how facilitators will redirect sensitive or unhelpful responses.

4. Include leaders with a range of temperaments and communication styles. Avoid relying primarily on charismatic or highly outgoing personalities, since students may struggle to relate to them or assume that effective ministry requires a similar personality. Seek leaders who can demonstrate how God works through quieter gifts, attentive listening, and steady faithfulness as well as through confidence and enthusiasm.

5. Confirm each leader's availability for the entire activity, including an arrival time at least 20–30 minutes before the program begins.

6. Explain "Day in the Life" and the developmental level of the students. Emphasize that students benefit from honest, concrete stories rather than idealized accounts of ministry alone.

7. Send panelists the questions and schedule in advance. Possible panel questions include:

    a. How did you begin to recognize God's call in your life?
    b. Did your sense of calling arrive suddenly, or did it develop over time?
    c. What does a typical day or week look like in your work?
    d. What part of your vocation brings you the most joy?
    e. What is one challenge people outside your work may not recognize?
    f. How do Scripture, prayer, worship, and Christian community sustain you?
    g. How has your understanding of calling changed over time?
    h. What advice would you give a young person who is beginning to discern a call?
    i. What do you wish you had known when you were in high school?
    j. How do you recognize God's work in ordinary or unexpected parts of your vocation?

8. Ask each leader to prepare a two-minute introduction that includes their name, role, ministry context, and a brief description of their vocational journey.

9. Prepare a small-group guide that encourages leaders to discuss their daily work, education or training, spiritual practices, formative experiences, challenges, and practical advice. Leaders should leave plenty of time for student questions.

10. Ask students to rank the vocational areas they are most interested in exploring before the activity. Use their responses to create two rotations while distributing group sizes as evenly as possible. Students should receive at least one of their preferred choices, when feasible, and may be encouraged to choose one unfamiliar area for their second rotation.

11. Prepare signs, name tags, schedules, rotation assignments, evaluation materials, and technology.

Leader Orientation: Immediately Before the Activity

1. Ask all leaders to arrive 20–30 minutes early.

2. Introduce the leaders to one another and review the schedule.

3. Show each leader where they will sit during the panel and where their small-group conversations will occur.

4. Remind leaders to use language that high school students can understand and to explain unfamiliar ministry terminology.

5. Encourage leaders to be honest about both the joys and difficulties of their work without sharing confidential or developmentally inappropriate information.

6. Remind leaders that students may be at very different stages of discernment. Leaders should not pressure students to claim a particular calling or make an immediate vocational commitment.

7. Pray together for the students and the conversations that will take place.

Beginning: Welcome and Panel Discussion

1. Welcome the students and briefly explain that Christian calling is larger than holding a church position. God calls people to love God and their neighbors and to participate in Christ's mission through many kinds of work and service.

2. Introduce the panelists and identify the vocational area represented by each person.

3. Establish expectations for the conversation:

    - Listen respectfully to each leader.
    - Recognize that no two experiences of calling are identical.
    - Ask honest and appropriate questions.
    - Respect personal or sensitive information shared by leaders or other students.
    - Remain open to areas of ministry or work that may be unfamiliar.

4. Conduct the 45-minute moderated panel. Keep answers concise enough that every panelist has an opportunity to speak. The moderator should invite conversation among the leaders and draw attention to both the differences and common themes in their experiences. Be attentive to charismatic or especially talkative panelists who may unintentionally dominate the discussion. Gently redirect lengthy responses and invite quieter leaders to contribute, helping students recognize that faithful leadership takes many forms.

5. Reserve the final 5–10 minutes of the panel for student questions, if time permits. Anonymous questions may be collected on note cards.

Middle: Small-Group Rotations

1. Explain the rotation process and direct students to their first assigned conversation area.

2. In the first small-group session, ask the ministry leader to:

    - Reintroduce themselves and briefly describe their role.
    - Offer a more detailed account of a typical day or week.
    - Share one meaningful experience and one significant challenge.
    - Describe the gifts, skills, education, and spiritual practices helpful in their vocation.
    - Explain how their work participates in God's mission.
    - Invite and respond to student questions.
    - Ask students what attracts them to this area or what makes them curious about it.
    - Suggest practical next steps for exploring the vocation.

3. Give a five-minute warning before the session ends.

4. Thank the leaders, then direct students to their second assigned area.

5. Repeat the same process for the second small-group session. Encourage students to notice similarities and differences between the two vocational areas.

6. Program staff should circulate among the groups to monitor timing, assist with questions, and ensure that every student has an opportunity to participate. When a leader or student dominates the conversation, gently redirect the discussion and make room for others, allowing quieter students time to respond without pressuring them to speak.

End: Reflection, Gratitude, and Prayer

1. Bring everyone back into the large-group space.

2. Invite students to reflect briefly on questions such as:

    - What did you hear today that surprised you?
    - What common themes did you notice across different vocations?
    - Where did you hear evidence of God's presence or guidance?
    - What is one vocation, gift, or question you would like to explore further?

3. Invite two or three students to share a brief response, if time allows.

4. Publicly thank the ministry leaders for sharing their time, wisdom, and stories.

5. Close with prayer, asking God to help students listen faithfully, recognize their gifts, remain open to the Spirit's guidance, and understand their lives as part of Christ's mission in the world.





Follow-Up and Clean-Up:

1. Collect evaluation forms and/or student reflections.

2. Return chairs, tables, technology, and breakout spaces to their original arrangement.

3. Collect signs, unused handouts, name tags, and supplies.

4. Send a thank-you message to each participating leader within several days, or have them already prepared to give them when they arrive.

5. When appropriate, share general student feedback with the leaders without disclosing confidential information.

6. Program staff should meet briefly after the event to identify strengths, needed changes, and potential leaders to invite to participate in future years.

7. Encourage mentors or small-group leaders to revisit the activity later in the program and ask students whether any of the conversations continue to shape their understanding of calling.

WHAT IF?

What if the activity is bombing?

One common challenge is the last-minute cancellation of a ministry leader. When possible, identify staff members or local leaders who could serve as substitutes. If an area is left without a leader, combine it with a closely related group or allow students to select another section.

Group sizes may be uneven because some vocational areas will attract more interest than others. Gathering student preferences in advance makes it possible to balance the rotations.

Panelists may speak too long, use specialized terminology, or focus more on promoting their organization than helping students discern. Sending questions in advance, offering a clear orientation, and using a confident moderator can keep the conversation focused. The moderator should feel free to redirect, summarize, or move to another speaker when necessary.

Some students may be hesitant to ask questions. Leaders can begin with a personal story, invite students to introduce themselves, or use prepared question cards to start the conversation. Anonymous questions can also help students raise matters they may feel uncomfortable asking publicly.

Also, providing students with time earlier in the day to review sample questions they can ask panelists, and giving them time to formulate some of their own questions, helps make space for students to practice before the panel and small-group discussions.

Students may assume that a divine call must be dramatic, unmistakable, or limited to ordained ministry.

Leaders should intentionally represent different experiences of calling and reinforce that discernment often happens gradually through Scripture, prayer, community, gifts, opportunities, and faithful response to present needs. Workplace or marketplace ministry is especially important for demonstrating that Christian vocation includes life and service beyond formal church employment.

Conversations about ministry challenges should be candid but appropriate. Leaders must protect confidential information and avoid using the session to criticize congregations, coworkers, supervisors, or former ministry settings.

If separate rooms are unavailable, create clearly marked areas in a large space and place the groups as far apart as possible. Acoustic dividers, hallways, lobbies, or outdoor gathering spaces may be used if they are safe and accessible.

A central lesson of this activity is that students remember people and stories more readily than abstract vocational information. Leaders should therefore prioritize honest experiences, concrete examples, and meaningful interaction over attempting to provide a comprehensive description of their profession.



EVALUATION

Day in the Life has proven highly effective. Students consistently speak positively about the activity, rate it well in program evaluations, and often remember particular leaders and conversations a year or more after participating. Its lasting influence appears to come from giving students personal access to practicing leaders and allowing them to connect large theological ideas about calling with the realities of daily Christian service.

Evaluation should measure the activity according to its stated objectives. Students may complete a brief written evaluation responding to prompts such as:

- Name two ways Christian calling can be expressed through ministry, work, or service.
- What did you learn about how Scripture, prayer, Christian community, personal gifts, or the needs of the world contribute to vocational discernment?
- Which two vocational areas did you explore?
- What is one insight or story you want to remember?
- What is one question you are still considering?
- What is one practical step you could take to further explore your gifts or calling?
- How comfortable did you feel asking questions and participating in the small-group conversations?
- How helpful was this activity in expanding your understanding of Christian calling?
- Which aspect of the activity was most meaningful, and what could be improved?

Program leaders can also evaluate participation by observing whether students ask questions, engage with the leaders, identify connections between faith and vocation, and articulate possible next steps. Mentors may revisit the experience later in the program through individual conversations or small-group debriefing.

EVALUATION

Longer-term effectiveness can be assessed through end-of-program evaluations or follow-up surveys conducted several months to a year later.

Students can be asked which leaders or stories they remember, whether the activity influenced their understanding of calling, and whether they pursued any new ministry, service, educational, or vocational opportunities as a result. The fact that students continue to recall these conversations and leaders well after the program provides meaningful evidence that the activity supports lasting vocational reflection rather than merely offering an enjoyable one-time experience.

Program and Creator:

This program is shared by Youth Becoming Leaders High School Christian Leadership and Global Transformation Institute.

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