

New (School) Year!  
Celebrating New Beginnings  
By Genni Sayers

Purpose

This session is designed as a New Year's celebration for the upcoming school year! High school youth look at the upcoming school year and set New Year's resolutions (goals) for themselves. They will celebrate the New (School) Year with a party to build community and get to know one another better.

Session at a Glance

7:00 p.m. Gather, Welcome, Session Overview  
7:10 p.m. Opening Prayer  
7:15 p.m. New Year Dreams  
7:20 p.m. Goal-Setting Activity  
Extend the Session: Scrapbooking the Resolutions (add 15-30 minutes)  
7:35 p.m. New Year's Party  
8:15 p.m. Closing Prayer: Resolutions  
8:30 p.m. Good Night!

Extend the Session: Scrapbooking the Resolutions (15-30 minutes)

After the "Goal Setting" activity, participants can take their "resolutions" one step further by creating a scrapbook page with their photo and their goals for the coming year. These pages could either be taken home and hung up or compiled into a youth ministry album to be revisited throughout the school year.

Materials Needed

- Nametags
- Pens, one for each participant
- Newsprint
- Masking tape
- Markers
- Index cards, one for each participant
- 8½ x 11 cardstock or 12 x 12 cardstock (optional)
- Polaroid camera or digital camera and color printer (optional)
- Glue (optional)
- New Years party favors
- Refreshments (consider sparkling grape or apple juice)
- New Year's decorations (optional)
- Dance, Dance Revolution (optional)
- Guitar Hero (optional)
- TV (optional)
- CD player (optional)
- Prayer table supplies including cloth, Bible, candle, school supplies (such as pencils, textbook, highlighter, etc.), and a basket
- Die-cuts of doves, apples, and stars (available at scrapbooking or crafts stores)

- Banner paper, or two sheets of newsprint taped together to form a banner

#### Prepare in Advance

1. Set up tables for refreshments and sign-in. Have one or two people at the sign-in table with a check-in sheet and name tags. Hospitality is important: As the facilitator, do not use the gathering time before the session begins to take care of last minute preparations. Spend the time moving among the participants, greeting and speaking with them.

Note to Leader: It would be ideal if you had two separate areas for this session, one for the “work” and the other for the party. If you can arrange this in the space you have then your party could truly be a surprise and you can have all of the activities and decorations already set up and in place. If your space does not allow for separate spaces, then use the element of surprise to your advantage and have enough adults to get set up in a flash!

2. Prepare a sheet of newsprint with the title “Dreams for the Coming Year!”

3. Prepare a sheet of newsprint with the following:

Goal Setting

Attainable – within your reach

Achievable – something you can accomplish within a set time frame

Tasks – steps to help you reach your goals

4. Prepare a sheet of newsprint with the following words:

Academic, Personal, and Spiritual

5. Order party favors with a New Year’s theme ([www.orientaltrading.com](http://www.orientaltrading.com)).

6. Ask volunteers to organize refreshments with a New Year’s touch! Consider sparkling cider in plastic champagne flutes, for example.

7. Decide on party activities. Obtain necessary materials/ supplies for the different options.

Electronics: Dance Dance Revolution, Guitar Hero set up – some of your youth will own these and be willing to share!

Dance or Music: have some of your youth leaders bring CDs or an MP3 play list of current music—be sure to remind them that the music needs to be Church appropriate!

Icebreakers: Decide which activities you will use and make sure someone on the team is ready to lead them.

10. Invite a young person to proclaim the reading for the closing prayer service.

11. Hang banner paper on the wall near the prayer space.

#### Session Outline

Gather, Welcome, Session Overview (10 minutes)

Greet everyone as they arrive and make sure each person makes a nametag.

Once everyone has arrived, present an overview of the session by saying in your own words:

Tonight we are going to look ahead at the coming school year. We will look at our dreams and visions for the coming year and set some personal goals for ourselves. We will then celebrate our goals and offer each other support along the journey.

Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

Prayer Leader: (begin with the Sign of the Cross)

Lord Jesus,

Please bless our time together this evening. Send your Spirit down to rest upon us and help us to dream of our desires for the new school year. May your Spirit guide us along the path that you have chosen for our journey through the coming year. Be our guide and companion, in your name we pray. Amen.

Activity: New Year Dreams (5 minutes)

On newsprint, ask the participants to name some of their dreams for the coming school year. These can be related to school, personal, or youth ministry. List the dreams on the newsprint entitled "Dreams for the New Year!" If they get stuck or are slow starting, suggest ideas such as making the honor roll, winning at least five football games, or finding a date to prom. Encourage them to be as practical or outlandish as they desire.

Activity: Goal Setting (15 minutes)

Post the newsprint with the Goal Setting information. In your own words say the following:

At the beginning of each New Year, our society has a custom of setting "New Year's Resolutions." This practice usually involves an individual resolving to change some habit about themselves that they deem unworthy or inappropriate. Common examples of this would be to lose weight, exercise more, or giving up smoking. Other resolutions might be to get organized or take up that hobby that they have wanted to do for years.

Typically, the average person doesn't even get through a week before the resolution is tossed by the wayside and long forgotten. Why is this? Why do we commit to something only to give up so easily? We even have a saying that says, "Resolutions are made to be broken." It is acceptable to give up on your resolution because nobody takes them seriously to start with!

So why bother? We bother because we all have hopes and dreams that our lives will become better in one way or another. Maybe we dream of making cheerleader or finally passing all of our classes. Maybe we really want to star in the school play or quit procrastinating on our homework assignments. Maybe we want to attend the retreat this

year or serve on the youth ministry leadership team. Maybe, just maybe, we want this year to be different than last year.

That's why we are going to set goals for the coming year. Goals are different than resolutions because unlike "New Year's Resolutions," they are not fleeting. Goals have two primary characteristics—they must be both attainable and achievable. Goals are not meant to be so far fetched that there is no point in pursuing them. Goals are meant to be reached. They can be temporary, short-term or long-term in their nature. They exist in order to help us accomplish something.

To say that a goal must be attainable means that it is not so far out of reach that there is no way you or I will ever attain or reach it. For example, as a teen, your chances of owning the Luxor Hotel in Las Vegas are pretty far out of reach. At this point in your life, that would not be a good temporary or short-term goal.

To say that a goal is achievable means that it is something that you can accomplish in a set amount of time. For example, losing 50 pounds by Friday night is not an achievable goal; it would be impossible to do that in a reasonable way. However, making a goal to attend two youth ministry events a month is achievable!

Goals are only as good as you make them out to be. If you commit yourself to your goals, you can accomplish them. With each goal comes not only commitment, but discipline. You must honor your decisions and be willing to work for them. That's where tasks come into play. You can make goals all day long, but you are never going to accomplish those goals if you are not willing to work for them. Tasks are the action items that need to be accomplished in order for your goals to be reached. For example, if your goal is to make cheerleader, some of your tasks might be to practice cheers daily, take a gymnastics class, or attend tryouts.

At this time I invite you to write a goal for yourself in each of the following areas: academic, personal, and spiritual. After you have written your goals, write at least one task that you know will have to be completed in order to achieve that goal.

Distribute index cards and give them a few minutes of silent working time, then say:

Studies have shown that people who keep their goals in plain view are more likely to achieve them. So you should post these goals where you will see them each day, some place like your bathroom mirror, in your car, or in your locker. If you feel comfortable in doing so, share your goals with others who can support you in your efforts.

Note to Leader: Have personal examples of goals from your own life for each of the categories. Some examples might include: Academic – I want to take a computer or web class; Personal – I will work out twice a week; and Spiritual – I will get up and read Scripture three mornings a week. Float around during this time and act as a resource for the participants to help them to set goals that are both attainable and achievable. Offer suggestions if they get stuck.

### Happy New Year's Party! (40 minutes)

At this time, pull out the New Year's party supplies and shout "Happy New (School) Year! Explain to the participants that for the next 40 minutes they will have a chance to celebrate and kick off the New School Year. Don't forget the food!

Note to Leader: Depending on your group's likes and dislikes, you could offer a variety of activities during this time: Dance Dance Revolution, Guitar Hero game, a dance, music and socializing or a variety of ice breakers. Use your best judgment, but don't feel pressured to "over plan" the time. Allow them to relax and enjoy sometime together as you relax and mingle with them as well!

### New Year's Resolutions: Closing Prayer Service (15 minutes)

#### Gather

Call everyone together in a circle around the prayer table, which has on it school supplies, a Bible, pens, and die cuts of apples, doves, and stars. Hang a sheet of newsprint or banner paper on the wall closest to your prayer space. Have pens or markers available in a basket on the floor near the table.

Prayer Leader: (begin with the Sign of the Cross)

God of dreams and goals,

Tonight we celebrated a new beginning—the start of a new school year. We set New Year's goals that are both attainable and achievable, and we have laid out a plan for accomplishing these goals that we have set for ourselves. Guide us in the coming year as we work to make these goals a reality in our lives. We ask this in your Son's name. Amen.

#### Listen

Invite the reader to proclaim Ecclesiastes 3:1-13. Allow a few moments of quiet reflection after the reading.

Prayer Leader:

This reading from Ecclesiastes 3 should have sounded familiar to you. We know that for everything under heaven there is a designated time; that seasons come and seasons go, that events happen and pass on. What is important to us today will be only a fleeting memory tomorrow. There is a time for every purpose under heaven. Tonight we set goals for ourselves and these goals aren't going to be accomplished overnight. They are going to take time and patience. There is a time for everything, and maybe right now is your time and maybe not, but the question is asked "What does the worker gain from his toil?" We know that with hard work, we can accomplish our goals; it will take time, it will take dedication, and it will take the help and support of others. But we also know, "That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil—this is the gift of God." With God all things are possible!

#### Respond

Invite the participants to take one (or more) die cut(s) from the table. The apples represent academics, the doves spiritual, and the stars personal. On the die cut, have them write a goal that they set for themselves so that the community can support them in their journey. After they have written their goal(s), have them hang the goals on the banner that will be displayed at future youth gatherings.

Go Forth  
Prayer Leader:

Let us lift up these resolutions, these goals, as we pray:  
Holy Spirit, guide our actions as we strive to make ourselves better people and accomplish the dreams of our hearts. Lord Jesus, walk beside us as our brother and friend. Heavenly Father, strengthen us for the journey ahead and help us to attain our goals and achieve our dreams. In your name we pray. Amen.

Allow the participants to offer any intentions that they may have before closing with a "Sign of Peace" as a sign of their support for one another.

Announcements  
Make any announcements you have for the coming weeks.

The website mentioned in this session was successfully accessed on February 23, 2008.

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