


Starting a Christian Music Library for Your Student Ministry

by Mark Pittman

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interlinc-online.com
800-725-3300

Each Wednesday evening as students pull into the church parking lot you hear them coming, not because of a faulty muffler but by the heavy groove vibrating and shaking its way through their almost shattering car windows. Some brave youth leaders will venture towards the rolling stereo and seek out a name or title of the audio assault. Many of those leaders will be shocked (while others know too well) by what their youth group listens to on their own. Our surveys of youth group students show that on average, students listen to 4-5 hours of music each day, and that 80% of those youth group students listen SOLELY to secular (the not-so-great for them) music.

If You Loan It They Will Listen

Some youth group students listen only to secular music because that's all they know. These kids haven't been exposed to good Christian music and therefore don't have a way to find out about the huge variety of Christian music available to them. As a youth leader, you have the incredible opportunity to expose your youth ministry to the music that can actually build-up, encourage and motivate them spiritually. To accomplish this amazing feat, we would like to recommend that you set up a Christian music listening library.

No Quiet In This Library

Just "setting up" the library isn't enough. Your kids will need a little persuading and enticing before they stampede the CD shelves. First, you must PLAY the music for your group – and don't be afraid to play it LOUDLY (if the elders are frowning you might have the right volume... if they convene an emergency meeting, you may want to turn it down a tad). Secondly, don't be too enthusiastic about the music; let the students discover the music in their way and on their time. You don't want to walk up to that kid dressed in all black and say, "Here, this is Christian music – listen to this instead of that garbage you're listening to now." Play a variety and then let them ask you about the songs and the groups that they like. "Hey, who is this?" is a very positive thing to hear from your students! Keep playing CD's from a bunch of different groups to expose your kids to a wide variety of music. Some youth leaders play a CD during Wednesday night walk-in and then from stage will ask, "Who liked the music tonight?" When a number of students respond positively, they toss the CD to one of them and then say, "Bring it back next week." In essence you are jumpstarting the lending culture in your ministry. Finally, even if you have no "takers" the first time, keep trying... your "library" may be as simple as letting kids borrow the CD's that are in your car or in the Church van. To that point, try and have a variety of CD's with you when you travel... call them "road trip

tunes” and be ready to loan them out.

If you Build It They Will come

Your library needs to have a little “flava” (that’s style/personality). Think about the location first – pick someplace that has the best access for your group – some place that they walk past on Sunday’s and Wednesday’s. We don’t recommend you make the youth music library a part of your church library. Secondly, make it cool – take some time to decorate your library area with posters or do a cool paint job on the shelves. Throw in some beanbags or nifty thrift store couches. The vibe can sometimes make all the difference. Third, get wired for sound – it’s crucial that the students be able to “taste” the CD’s before they borrow. This could mean a cool stereo for kids to crank all at once or it could mean a bunch of walk-man type CD players so that multiple kids can listen to multiple CD’s at the same time. Some churches have even put up white boards around the listening area for kids to leave “graffiti” reviews as the listen... other youth ministries have official CD review sections in their newsletter. How set up your library and handle check out is up to you... we’ve even seen a Velcro wall with pictures of students that are placed in the CD jewel case of the CD they’ve borrowed!

No Uptight Librarian

A CD library is an excellent opportunity for you to encourage some student ownership. There’s probably a student (or group of students) in your ministry right now that would be willing to help create and organize your CD’s. You might even have them create a way to review and communicate their reviews to the ministry. Maybe they are the ones that choose what CD’s are played during walk-in... they can kind-of “DJ”. Another great advantage of having students help is that they can help keep you “in the know” as to what groups students are listening to and they can help with the “sounds like” comparisons for the rest of the group.

Keep It Fresh

Just like you clean out your refrigerator, make sure your CD collection is current. You might want to look for a new home for CD’s that are older than a year and a half. Of course you’ll need to keep a current flow of CD’s going into the library. CD’s that exit the library are good candidates for the prizes. You should also expect to lose some CD’s – some youth leaders are more than happy to lose a Christian CD to a kid who just listens to secular music.

The Last Word

Placing good Christian music into your students' hands will take persistence on your part. The process may take some time, so don't give up. It will take time for the thought that Christian music is "worthy" to take affect – then it will take some time for your students to find the artists that meeting their style needs. Over the long haul your persistence will have spiritual repercussions in their lives. You will begin to see their music listening habits change.