

Your first meeting after Flame Congress

This document gives you a lot of ideas rather than a concrete session plan, although there is a suggested outline for a whole meeting at the end.

What and why?:

Whenever you take young people to something powerful, you want to make sure that the experience will carry on and mean something. This might happen all by itself – to a certain extent it will – but the fact is that unless adult leaders put some thought into how to carry on the experience, there is a good chance that a lot of the learning, euphoria, atmosphere etc, will eventually die out.

This is what we mean when we talk about 'Fanning the Flame' and it's really important to start straight away. The longer you leave it after March 24th, the more momentum you will have lost, so it's important to have a meeting with your group as soon as possible after Flame to plan the way ahead.

You might be coming back from Flame with a group that's already pretty well established, like a parish youth group for instance. On the other hand, your group may be one which was just put together specifically for Flame. These resources are largely aimed at the latter, but will have a lot of good ideas for more established groups too.

Plan and advertise your meeting:

It's a good idea to have your meeting as soon as possible after Flame. Perhaps not in the first few days afterwards, but certainly in the first few weeks. Pick a location that's comfortable and then make sure you advertise the meeting, and then remind people about it! Building successful groups and events in youth ministry is as much about advertising and publicity as anything else. You need to use all the means at your disposal to advertise the event (Facebook? Twitter? Text messages? Word of mouth? Letters? Parish newsletter announcements? Poster?) and then you need to remind people so that they turn up.

Where and when?:

If your group is based in a school, why not take the students out of a lesson. They'll be far more likely to turn up that way, and it will be worthwhile for the school if a stable, vibrant group is built up.

If you're a parish based group then an evening will probably be a good time to have your meeting. Probably one day between Monday-Thursday at around 7.00pm. Saturdays and Sundays can often be quite busy for older teenagers, and Friday nights can also be unpopular. 7.00pm is a good start time as it allows people to get home and relax for a while (and it also allows parents to get home so they can give lifts!) and also means that the evening won't finish too late.

In terms of your meeting location, if you are in a school then perhaps an empty classroom, a library, or a chaplaincy room? If you're a parish group, then what about a parish meeting room or the parish hall?

You should try to make the room you use warm and inviting and you should also make sure it's appropriate for your group. Large halls, for instance, can be good for larger groups, but with smaller groups they can tend to lack atmosphere and intimacy, meaning that a smaller room can be much better.

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It might be a good idea to decorate your room before the meeting with some things to remind the group of their experience at Flame. If you made a Flame collage/ display beforehand (as suggested in the prep resources) why not bring that in? You can also display some photos from the day. If you have access to a digital projector, why not create a slideshow of photos (this can be done very easily by right-clicking in a folder of photos and selecting the slideshow option) or show some of the media/ video from the day?

By (Easter at the latest) there will be videos of the day available via the Flame website. These might be really useful for this meeting, and indeed for future meetings.

Food and drink is always a winner!:

Experience shows that people are far more likely to turn up to meetings, and far more likely to enjoy them, if refreshments are available. If you're going for an evening meeting, you might even consider having a meal together to begin the meeting.

What to actually do:

There are a few things that are important to do in your first meeting. You should give your group some space to reflect and discuss their memories of the day and you should also have a discussion about what happens next. With that in mind, here is a suggested format for the meeting:

Start with a Prayer – Beginning the meeting with a meaningful prayer is always a great way to set the tone. There is a suggested group prayer elsewhere in this pack, if you're struggling for ideas.

Let the group share their memories – Why not set aside some time to let the group talk about the day. Here are some suggested questions to get a discussion going:

- What was your favourite part of the day?
- How did you feel at the end of the day?
- What surprised you most about the day?
- What did you learn from the day about your faith?
- Which of the stories/ elements from the day had the more powerful effect on you?
- Did it surprise you to see so many other young Catholics there?

Talk about what you want to do next – Explain to the group that it would be a shame not to capitalise on the experience and to let the group just drift apart. If you are already a stable group, then you can have a chat about how the Flame experience might shape or affect what you do as a group.

If you don't already have a stable group, then have a chat about what kind of a group you want to create. There is a document in this pack called 'Some help with building a group' which will give you a lot of help with this and suggest some of the different sorts of group which you can build.

At this point, it's important to get the balance right between your ideas and the groups ideas. The important thing is what the group feels that they need and what they feel would work best for them. If, for instance, the ideas they come up with are more social than faith-based, then you might want to tweak them a little bit, but it's important not to ignore the ideas that they have. By all means, go armed with some of your own ideas, but pay careful attention to what the group think of them and be prepared for them to be rejected!

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Do something social – Christian fellowship is important, and that's why successful meetings and well-bonded groups usually have a social element to them. Even if it's just a short time at the beginning or the end of the meeting to enjoy some food and chat together, it's well worth doing.

End the meeting with a prayer and a future date – One thing that's vital to maintaining group momentum, is to know at the end of a session when and where the next session is going to happen. It would be great if you could nail this down during the meeting (or even before) so that everybody can take it away with them

Come out with a plan:

Have you ever been to a meeting where lots of things have been discussed, but you've found yourself coming away thinking 'So, what are we actually doing?'

It happens a lot. The initiative to actually make things happen can get lost under a sea of good intentions and brilliant ideas, and that's why it's important to come out of meetings like this with a plan.

After your discussion you should know what the next steps are. What exactly is going to happen? Whose responsibility is it to make it happen? When are they going to have it done by?

Bringing others in:

After an experience like Flame there is a danger that the experience will eventually fade away and you will lose momentum. This is why the 'Fan the Flame' project exists. It's important to remember that there is also another danger though; an opposing danger, that the group will become insular and 'cliquey,' excluding others in their communities who weren't at the event.

The Catholic Church is naturally a movement which seeks to include others and bring them in, and so part of your planning after Flame must include how you are going to include other people who weren't at Flame in whatever you chose to do going ahead. You might not find it practical to have them in your very first meeting, but they should at least be part of your thinking.