



How to ...

Set up and run a Christian Youth Band

Sharing the gospel with young people is incredibly important so what is an easy way to do this? Running a Christian band for young people is a great way to engage them and pass on the good news. The words of the songs you sing will be helpful but just as helpful is the opportunity it gives you to work alongside young people so that they can see the difference Jesus makes to your life – challenging at times but fun! This guide contains a few helpful starting points.

When is a Band not a Band?

A Band is not a worship group. A Band has its own identity and is not restricted to playing for services in its home church. It may well be inter-denominational. It will play music that is not necessarily suitable for services. This could include popular songs provided the theme is compatible with Christianity (eg 'Tears In Heaven' by Eric Clapton or 'Everything I Do' by Bryan Adams). Band members will meet socially as well as for rehearsals. There are lots of different activities the band can become involved in.

The story of a Christian Band (The Elastic Band) can be found at <https://www.elasticband.org.uk> and in the book of the same name that I have published which is available via Amazon. The book tells the story of the band and gives lots of further information about how to go about launching and running a similar band.

Here are some of the activities the Elastic Band enjoyed:

- Gargling hymn tunes using lemonade not water and going to Burger King
- Going on a Church crawl on a Sunday morning, playing in as many church services as possible (5 in this case)
- Playing at 4am on the main stage of an all-night Christian youth festival
- Having a pool party using Christian songs as the music on the pool sound system

Do you have to be a musician to start a Band?

There needs to be a minimum of two adults to start this initiative but only one needs to be a musician. It's a good idea if the other isn't a musician because this will help to make sure the focus remains on getting to know the young people who are the other band members. The adult musician could be a pianist, singer or guitar player. It helps if they have access to a music notation program (such as Sibelius) but there may be other members of the congregation who can help with this. It is helpful if one of the adults has experience in dance or deaf signing as both of these activities can appeal to young people who are not musicians themselves but want to be a part of the Band.

How to get started

- The best way is to find at least one other like-minded person. Pray with them and ask for God's guidance about how the Band should operate.
- Decide how long you want the Band to run for (three years is a good starting point), when and where you want to meet and plan activities for the first three sessions. For ideas about this look at "The Elastic Band – Adventures in Christian Youth Ministry Through Music" by Ros Oswald which is available on Amazon in hard copy and Kindle.

- Speak to the youth leaders and leadership in your church and any other local churches and find out who might be interested in joining the Band. Speak to each young person and find out how they feel about it. Don't worry at this stage about the line-up of instruments they do or don't play. It is possible to be very flexible about this.
- Speak to the Parish Safeguarding Officer in your church and make sure that the necessary checks are carried out. Ask their advice about what records to keep. Check out the church insurance policy.
- Start meeting and start a diary of what happens.
- Make sure you do not have any services to play for – at least for the first six weeks – remember this is not a worship group. You can and will play for services but first of all you need to get to know each other and find out what does and does not work.

Relationships with others

Running a Band is hard work but incredibly rewarding. It can cause difficulties in relationships with others at times, particularly if the music the Band is playing is not the type of music a congregation is used to hearing. Here are some tips

- The church leadership have official roles within the church and it is important that you work with them. They can be so helpful and supportive when you are trying out new ideas. It is always important to talk things through beforehand so that they understand what you are trying to do and you don't make their lives any more difficult than they already are!
- Parents of Band members are to be valued and respected. They are likely to be members of congregations at which you will be playing and they may be willing to provide transport and even food when needed. Do not forget that you may be ministering to them without even consciously realizing it.
- Church congregations can be unpredictable. In my experience they may love the Band just because it brings young people into the church, hate the Band because they just don't like the music they play or tolerate the Band because they would rather have young people around than not.
- Shop assistants in music shops and people who work in recording studios are interested in music – whatever it is and wherever it is played. I found them incredibly helpful and genuinely interested in the Band. Evangelism never ends and the conversations I had with these people surprised and delighted me when they showed such an interest.

Acoustic or Electric?

Anyone who has tried to set up a Band or been involved in one will know that one big issue is whether to play acoustically or whether to get involved with sound systems and electrification (once referred to as “A Dark Art” in my presence). There are pluses and minuses to each approach. There is no denying the fact that a great many young people would far rather play an electric guitar than a flute. Equally, if anyone in the band wants to play a drum kit you will need to use microphones for everything else just to be heard. The short answer is that the line-up of the Band will probably dictate which way you need to go but as there are still some churches for whom electricity is not always a given then acoustic skills do have their place.

Help!

Youth work is not an individual pursuit, but a team game. Get a good team around you, pray regularly for your Band members and get help where you can. Dan Jones, the Diocesan Youth and Children's Advisor would also be happy to advise and support you; 0117 906 0100 or Daniel.jones@bristoldiocese.org

Written by Ros Oswald creator of The Elastic Band, musician, author of The Elastic Band – Adventures in Christian Youth Ministry through Music, music teacher