The Countdown Calendar

The countdown calendar is addressed to the DiscipleNow coordinator; but when the task is the responsibility of a work team, the work team best equipped to carry out that task is located in parentheses. Read the entire calendar through before you start. Adapt this suggested calendar to your church and situation.

The main task of the coordinator is to oversee the work of all DiscipleNow committees by chairing the steering committee. Enlist steering committee members who will head the work teams necessary to plan, conduct, and evaluate all aspects of the weekend. As you study this guide, make notes for yourself of things you will need to do on the space provided on the countdown calendar. Give work teams clear guidelines outlining their responsibilities. You can duplicate the countdown calendar and highlight the responsibilities for each work team.

Before the Weekend

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12 Months Before DiscipleNow

- ❑ Discuss with pastor, church staff, and appropriate church leadership.
- ❑ Work with appropriate church leadership in preparing a budget for the weekend. Decide if you will charge a registration fee or if you will provide everything at no cost to students. Will scholarships be available? If so, determine the criteria for scholarship qualification.
- ❑ Select a date for DiscipleNow. Check the church and school calendars for potential conflicts. Check the weeks preceding and following the tentative date for major events. Include a sign-up deadline. Many churches find that one to two weeks before the event works well as a deadline for registration.
- ❑ Enlist speakers, musicians, and group leaders enlisted from outside your church as soon as possible, preferably one year ahead of time.
  - Be clear about agreements related to travel, meals, and other expenses, as well as honorarium. Get these arrangements in writing. It may be best to sign a contract, but at minimum send a letter to each person detailing these agreements.
  - Making travel arrangements yourself may help you control the cost as well as arrival and departure times.

9 Months

- ❑ The most important preparation for a DiscipleNow is prayer. Enlist a prayer warrior to chair a prayer committee. Involve the pastor, students, leaders, and the entire church in an intensive prayer effort for DiscipleNow.

6 Months

- ❑ Prepare a tentative schedule for the weekend. Balance free time, recreation, and Bible study. Include time for evaluation and follow-up. Encourage your steering committee to refine the schedule as you plan for the event.

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❑ Enlist members of your steering committee.
- Each person enlisted for the steering committee serves as the chairman of one of the work teams. Enlist each chairman with a specific work team in mind.
- Provide a handout detailing each work team responsibility to avoid problems later.
- Schedule a committee meeting as soon as possible.
- Discuss the job descriptions, budget, and tentative schedule. Begin discussing the focus and theme of the event. Give each chairperson a tentative schedule with his or her assignments and deadlines highlighted. Update with new information as it becomes available. Ask that you be kept informed of progress and any major problems.
- Direct them to begin enlisting their work team members.

❑ Develop a DiscipleNow logo and/or art for your event. You may want your promotional art to reflect the theme of your event. Include name of your church, your town, and the year. Consult artists in your church for help. *(Publicity)*
- The DiscipleNow logo in this guide may be reproduced and used on all the DiscipleNow publicity before the weekend, as well as on items used by the youth such as T-shirts and notebooks. The DiscipleNow logo in this guide may not be used on items for sale.

❑ Secure facilities needed. Reserve meeting space in your church facility and/or at other locations you will use such as the local school gym. Double-check that it is written on your church calendar. *(Arrangements)*

5 Months

❑ Meet with the steering committee. Discuss new information and check on work team enlistment and progress.

❑ Begin to talk with parents and youth about what DiscipleNow is and when it is scheduled.

❑ Begin enlistment of group leaders from within the church.

❑ Begin enlistment of host families. *(Host Homes)*

4 Months

❑ Meet with the steering committee to discuss progress. Confirm the event schedule.

❑ Confirm enlistment of group leaders in writing. Have them complete the *Getting to Know You* form (p. 5).

❑ Confirm enlistment of hosts families in writing. Have them complete the *Getting to Know You* form (p. 5). *(Host Homes)*

❑ Obtain single copies of study book(s)/curriculum you want to consider for the weekend. If you are considering more than one study invite your pastor, the steering committee

and/or students to offer input into the course you choose. Choose the study book(s)/curriculum for the weekend and order at least enough copies for each group leader.

❑ Consider having a brief informational meeting on a Sunday afternoon to generate excitement and answer questions.
- Invite all work team members, host families, local group leaders, youth teachers and leaders in your church, and church staff.
- Invite a student to offer a testimony from a previous DiscipleNow experience.

❑ Decide on any speciality items.
- Possibilities include T-shirts, buttons, notebooks, or book covers.
- T-shirts could be given to youth when they arrive at the event. However, providing students with a T-shirt when they register will help with your promotion of the event. Whatever you decide begin production early. *(Publicity)*

❑ Decide what printed materials are needed. Possibilities include letters to potential participants, a promotional brochure, and registration reminders. *(Publicity)*

3 Months

❑ Meet with steering committee to discuss progress.

❑ Place notice in church newsletter. Share the basics of the weekend—date, cost, brief explanation of DiscipleNow, and who it is for. *(Publicity)*

❑ Send event information pack to group leaders and ask them to begin preparation. *(Packet)*
- Include a copy of the study book/curriculum you are asking them to teach.
- Enclose a schedule.
- Enclose information on travel arrangements.
- Enclose a supply request sheet for any supplies they may need, such as books, equipment (AV, etc.), pencils, paper, and any printing or copying needs.
- Tell leaders about any activity on the schedule that requires special dress or preparation.
- Send materials to help leaders with their own spiritual preparation for the weekend. Include reading material related to the theme of the weekend or a spiritual inventory of some type.

❑ Consider launching challenging discipleship courses immediately following DiscipleNow such as a class for new Christians, an in-depth study on the topic of the weekend, or an *Experiencing God* group.

2 Months

❑ Meet with steering committee to discuss progress.

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- ❑ Conduct host family orientation meeting. *(Host Homes)*

- ❑ Consider designing a promotional brochure. You can design the brochure to double as a poster. Mail to prospective students as well as students of your group one month prior to registration. *(Publicity)*

- ❑ Mail registration information to youth. *(Publicity)*
  - Information may be in the form of a letter to youth, prospects, and parents or it may be included in the brochure. Include the process for registration.
  - If you are sending a letter consider including a registration card for the youth to fill out and return, parental release forms, and guidelines for the weekend.
  - Plan for the mailing to arrive at the home a week before registration begins.

- ❑ Order the study book/curriculum for the number of students you anticipate. Also, order materials for courses you plan to offer immediately after DiscipleNow weekend. You may also want to order materials to give to new Christians (such as *The Survival Kit for Youth*).

4 Weeks

- ❑ Begin registration approximately four weeks prior to DiscipleNow. Include at least three Sundays in your registration. *(Publicity)*

- ❑ Update group leaders and host families on progress and news by mail, e-mail, fax, or phone.

- ❑ A personal, handwritten card given to each student in Sunday School can be a great way to get their attention.

- ❑ Print and have ready the forms needed during the DiscipleNow weekend such as schedules, evaluation forms, student data sheets, permission forms for students to miss a segment of time, permission forms for students to drive their own cars to the host home. *(Packet)*

- ❑ Publicize DiscipleNow in your local newspapers and if possible in school newsletters/newspapers. *(Publicity)*

- ❑ Encourage students to tell friends about the event.

- ❑ Publicize DiscipleNow the week before registration and again the week before DiscipleNow begins. *(Publicity)*
  Suggestions include:
  - Yard Party—Give a team of students a list of two or three potential DiscipleNow participants and have the teams take a party to the potential participants. Teams drive up to the house; unload lawn chairs, cokes, cookies, and party hats; knock on the door; and invite the participant out for a 10-minute party to let that student know they care and want him or her to come to DiscipleNow.

- Home Car Wash—Find a potential participant's car, wash the windshield, and leave a DiscipleNow brochure under the windshield wiper. Write a note of invitation.

2 to 3 Weeks

❑ Food team leaders call their teams together to give final instructions, share menus, and answer questions. *(Food)*

❑ Mail or e-mail a registration reminder. Remind students when and where the event starts and what they need to bring.

❑ Hand out "DiscipleNow Visitation Blitz" Assignments. The final week of registration should be an all-out effort by everyone to get the word out about DiscipleNow and the registration deadline.

❑ Arrange for sound equipment. Consider all equipment needs such as equipment for background music to full sound equipment for a concert. Prearrange speciality items.

❑ Request checks so they will be available on the needed date for the leaders' honorariums and travel expenses, food service, and any other services. If exact amounts are not known be sure current funds are earmarked and reserved.

1 to 2 Weeks

❑ End registration on the Sunday night one to two weeks prior to DiscipleNow. Consider having a youth fellowship following the worship service. *(Publicity)*
- Provide food, fun, excitement, and testimonies by students who are going to be involved in DiscipleNow. Provide brochures and registration cards for last minute registrations.

❑ A specific cut off date for registration is important because a lot of work takes place following the registration deadline. Final plans have to be made regarding:
- assigning youth to host homes
- confirming total enrollment with food work team
- making sure you have enough curriculum and printed handouts such as schedules and evaluation forms

❑ Make home assignments for the students. Plan to spend a number of hours on this task.

❑ Meet with steering committee. Discuss last minute details. Make sure all pieces are in place before the weekend.

❑ Finalize all food plans for DiscipleNow. Gather paper goods for the hosts homes. Estimate number of cups, plates, napkins, plastic utensils, paper towels, trash bags, and toilet paper that each host will need. *(Food)*

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❑ Prepare packets for hosts with a schedule, evaluation forms. Also, include the *Getting to Know You* form the group leader completed, along with his or her name, phone, and address. *(Packet)*

❑ Knowing where everyone is will be vital if an emergency arises.
- Work with the steering committee to make a chart of host families, group leaders, and food teams.
- Include on the list the students assigned to each host family.
- Include name, address, and phone numbers.
- Distribute to all leaders. Keep a master list of all groups and give a copy to the church secretary to be kept in the church office.

❑ Consider printing a DiscipleNow weekend guide for each participant. Include the schedule, host home groupings, youth guidelines, names and addresses of group leaders and committee members, and any other pertinent information. Encourage participants to write notes of appreciation to hosts and group leaders. *(Packet)*

The final week

Monday Before DiscipleNow

❑ Consider having a dinner/prayer/fellowship for hosts families, steering committee, and other leadership. Share your excitement, go over names registered and last minute details, pray. Give out host packets and paper goods. Ask hosts for maps to their homes for you to duplicate and pass out.

❑ Make sure all printed material is ready. *(Packet)*

❑ Food team leaders contact their host families. (Ask which entrance will be the most inconspicuous for food deliveries so as not to disturb the study session.)

Tuesday Before DiscipleNow

❑ Prepare packets for leaders. Include the schedule, group leader and host list, *Getting to Know You* form completed by host family, study worksheets, map to host home, guidelines for the host family, leader orientation agenda, student personal profile worksheets, pen, evaluation forms for both students and leaders. *(Packet)*

❑ Personally invite the steering committee and the church staff to the Friday leadership banquet.

Wednesday Before DiscipleNow

❑ Prepare meeting agendas for the weekend. You will be coordinating the following events during the weekend—

- Friday group leader meetings
- Leadership Banquet
- Sunday morning schedule
- Sunday afternoon leader evaluation and lunch
- Worship services and special events

❑ Begin by reviewing the agendas suggested in this manual; but plan on spending uninterrupted time working on each agenda.

Thursday Before DiscipleNow

❑ Review leader travel arrangements. Plan an arrival schedule and pick up schedule. *(Transportation)*

❑ Check with steering committee for last minute details.

❑ Ensure all necessary preparations are done today. *(Hospitality* and *Arrangements)*

❑ Take a deep breath and get ready for a fantastic and never-to-be-forgotten weekend!

During the Weekend

❑ Coordinate or conduct the following events—
- Friday group leader meetings
- Leader banquet
- Sunday morning schedule
- Sunday afternoon snack supper and share time
- Evaluation with leaders
- Worship services and special events

❑ Always be accessible to hosts by telephone. Carry a cell phone or a beeper at all times. Make sure hosts and leaders have the phone number.

❑ Serve as a catalyst for helping the weekend infiltrate the total church by dispersing information and challenging members to be involved.

❑ When the guest leaders arrive, oversee their visit.
- Be sure they have transportation for the weekend. If necessary, rent cars or assign a driver and car to them for the weekend. Work closely with the transportation committee to ensure this goes smoothly. Make sure that they have transportation to the airport after the Sunday evening commitment service. *(Transportation)*
- Be sure their meals and expenses are taken care of including mileage on their cars. The host family will host the group leader through the weekend.
- Plan some recreational activities for the leaders on Friday afternoon or have several options available. Allow free time for final preparation and rest.

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- Consider hosting a small "get acquainted" reception for leaders allowing them time to visit with the church staff, host families, and other leaders following the banquet.

❑ Make an effort to visit in each host home during the weekend to let participants know you love and care about each person. Just five minutes in each home will make the difference. Consider taking your pastor and other staff members along. This will be a great opportunity to educate your pastor and/or staff members on the value of events for students.

Immediate Follow-up

❑ Meet with the steering committee to go over the evaluation forms. Discuss ways to incorporate the information into the planning for next year.

❑ Personally visit new Christians and encourage them in their decision. Help them to make plans for baptism and to become active in the church youth ministry.

❑ During the course of the weekend issues may arise that present an opportunity for a new direction in your youth ministry. Leader evaluation forms may identify an area of need that can be addressed with a study or event in the future.

❑ Assign adult youth leaders to students who make decisions at DiscipleNow to be encouragers following the weekend. This is especially important for new Christians.

❑ Conduct a debriefing time for in-house leadership with the follow-up work team within one week after the DiscipleNow. Review the evaluation forms:
- Student Evaluation of the Weekend
- Group Leader Evaluation of Each Student
- Group Leader Evaluation of the Weekend
- Host Family Evaluation of the Weekend

Ongoing Follow-up

❑ After the weekend is over write the leaders and express your appreciation for their work.

❑ Begin group studies you have planned. Send student not enrolled in a group a reminder note.

❑ Send a reminder letter to host families to send encouragement letters to their family group.

❑ Remind host families to send six-week follow-up letter and to plan a "Family Reunion."