

REACH!

Produced by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Commission on Youth Discipleship

Be An Inverse Paranoid

by Joel Nelson - CYD Administrator

In his book, *Angels Can Fly Because They Take Themselves Lightly*, Lutheran Pastor, Dr. Richard Bimler says, "If you want to keep happy and healthy, try being an inverse paranoid." Dr. Bimler defines an inverse paranoid as someone who thinks everyone is out to make him/her happy. Bimler says, "Try it, It works. Just imagine everyone you meet is trying to bring happiness and joy to your life. And then try to do the same for them." Dr. Bimler gets a bit more serious when he says, "You and I are called by God to be happy. To be happy does not mean that everything has to go right, and that problems and frustrations disappear. A happy person in the Lord is one who knows from where strength and comfort come." Bimler advises Christians to, "Live joyfully in the forgiveness that is theirs each day."

Many of the youth you minister to are in various stages of downdom. The physiological, psychological, and spiritual confusion going on inside of them blasts their self-worth. The home, school, and work environments they navigate each day frequently disappoint, disturb, and distaste them.



How wonderful for these same youth to come into contact with you, a fellow child of God, who lets the joy and confidence of knowing Jesus radiate from you like a light house beacon in a raging squall. How beneficial for these youth to hear from you that the Means of Grace, the Word and Sacraments, bring great peace and contentment in all of life's ups and downs. How wonderful to be met at each youth group meeting, activity, Bible class, and church service by an inverse paranoid like you who communicates, "Dear teen, I am going to make you happy today, because my connection with you and Jesus makes me so happy."

As summer begins, and teen activity elevates in many congregations, be the biggest inverse paranoid for Jesus you can be!

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Comments about this **REACH!** and ideas for future issues can be directed to . . .

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SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT:

“Social Norming” May Reduce Risky Teen Behavior

A new approach is being taken to deter risky behavior like drinking, drug abuse, and sexual activity by young people. Instead of simply being taught that such actions are bad, students are being taught these behaviors are uncommon. “Social norming” is a technique that assumes kids gravitate to the behavior they believe to be most “normal” in their peers.

Students often have an exaggerated view of their peers’ actions. A 1999 poll at the University of Washington in Seattle showed that students believed 95 percent of their classmates smoked, when in reality only one-third did. By showing students that the smoking rates are drastically lower, it is hoped that fewer will start smoking as a means to fit in.

Other statistics also show that young people may not be as bad off as some may think. Ninety-nine percent of students who drink do not engage in unwanted sex. Nine out of 10 college students have never damaged property as a result of drunkenness. Three out of four students have never failed an exam or project due to alcohol or drug use. Most students do not get trashed every night. The rate of alcohol and tobacco use is on the decline.

Despite common beliefs, experts say that it is not the norm for most young people to get drunk or high and have sex. Instead of scaring students away from risky behavior, social norming presents students with the case that most do not engage in such behaviors.

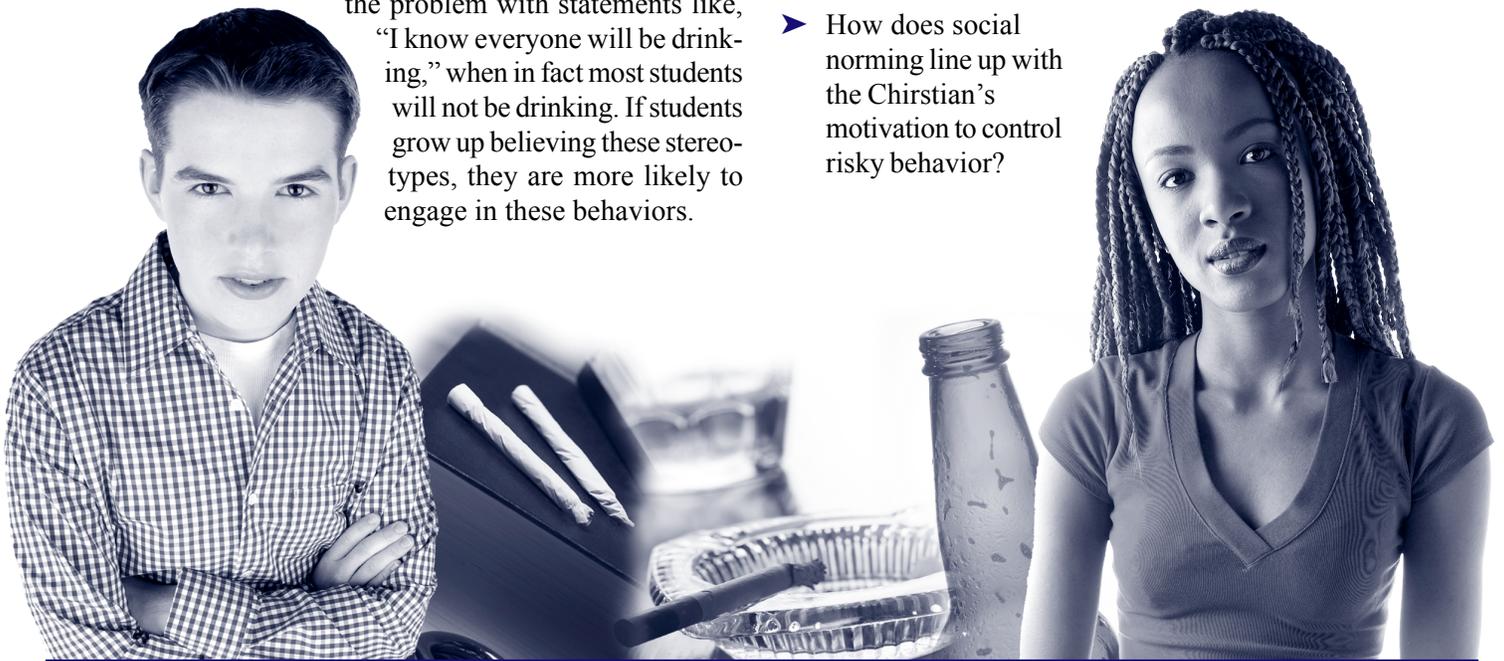
Psychologists say that parents and teachers often worsen the problem with statements like, “I know everyone will be drinking,” when in fact most students will not be drinking. If students grow up believing these stereotypes, they are more likely to engage in these behaviors.

According to USA Today, social norming has been adopted by at least 30 colleges nationwide including the universities of Arizona, North Carolina, Oregon, and Missouri. High schools and middle schools are also beginning to employ the program. The technique seems to be successful thus far. At the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh a 29% drop in student smoking can be attributed to social norming. Other schools using the program have also seen decreased alcohol and tobacco usage among their students.

Social norming programs may vary among campuses, but the techniques usually employ a form of social marketing. Polls are taken about various behaviors on the campus and then “marketed” back to the students. Some schools have brochures giving the statistics. Other strategies include posters, pencils, bumper stickers, and Frisbees that reveal the low rates of various risky behaviors. The technique is meant to work like an advertising campaign.

Want to Talk About It with Your Teens and/or Teen Parents?

- What are your teens’/parents’ reactions to the social norming concept?
- Why is social norming being used as a way to “control” behavior?
- Compare/contrast social norming and peer pressure.
- How does the psychology of social norming mesh with what the Bible says about norms?
- How does social norming line up with the Christian’s motivation to control risky behavior?



An Introduction to Asset Building

Why do some youth grow up with ease, while others struggle? Why do some youth get involved in dangerous activities, while others spend their time contributing to society? Why do some youth “beat the odds” in difficult situations, while others get trapped?

Many factors influence why some young people have successes in life and why others have a harder time. Economic circumstances, genetics, trauma, and many other factors play a role. But these factors—which seem difficult, if not impossible, to change—are not all that matters. *Search Institute*, (www.search-institute.org) a nonprofit, independent research organization based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, has identified 40 concrete, positive experiences and qualities—developmental assets—that have a tremendous influence on young people’s lives and choices. Research shows that the 40 developmental assets help young people make wise decisions, choose positive paths, and grow up competent, caring, and responsible.

The bad news is that the vast majority of young people in the United States—regardless of race or ethnicity, age, gender, cultural background, religion, or income level—experience too few of the assets. Indeed, on average, young people report experiencing just 18 of the 40 assets. The good news is that everyone from all walks of life can help build assets. You don’t have to be a parent, a teacher, a youth worker, or a counselor (though these people certainly have important roles in asset building). You can be a child, teenager, single adult, parent, grandparent—anyone can build assets.

This *Search Institute* web site (www.search-institute.org) is filled with research and other information about the developmental assets and how individuals, organizations, congregations, and communities can—and are—working to ensure that all children and youth experience more of these assets. What’s even more exciting, is that *Search* has developed a new asset-building resource specifically for Lutherans called, *Grounding Asset Building in Lutheran Faith*. This new resource was developed with the active participation of several WELS congregations and called workers and is to be available soon on the *Search* website. In the mean time, you may obtain it from Randi Griner at *Search* (randig@search-institute.org).

www.search-institute.org

Empower Youth Through Service

Because of their commitment of service to others, most congregations already involve young people in service projects. In addition to the benefits to people being served, the opportunities can be instrumental in the healthy development of youth, particularly in nurturing in young people caring values, commitments, and skills.

Because service involvement can be a powerful asset-building strategy, a goal for congregations might be to engage every young person, ages 5-18, in at least one service project each year. At the same time, these efforts should involve opportunities for youth to interact with caring adults as they work side by side.

In addition, a shift to an asset-building approach includes integrating young people into the leadership of the congregation. Involving youth as leaders builds important skills and competencies in young people, gives them a sense of real ownership of their programs and the congregation, and provides the congregation with new energy and enthusiasm.

From: Seefeldt, G. & Roehlkepartain, E., *Tapping the Potential: Discovering Congregations’ Role in Building Assets in Youth*, Search Institute, 1998.

Appointing WELS Teens to the International Youth Rally Planning Committee

The CYD has, as an on-going ministry, the organization and administration of the WELS International Youth Rally (IYR). The IYR has historically utilized a planning committee to work with the Rally Coordinator. Never in its history, has the IYR appointed WELS teens to serve on this committee. In an effort to obtain input and feedback from the age group served by the IYR, to communicate to WELS teens synodically that their contribution is valued, and as a way to demonstrate to WELS congregations the need to engage teens in ministry planning at all levels, the CYD will appoint three WELS teens to the International Youth Rally Planning Committee. Information on this process, the criterion, and the official *Teen Member Nomination Form* can be obtained from CYD. Email: cyd@sab.wels.net or call 414-256-3274.

Youth Rally Update

The 2003 rally at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, CO will host 2,500 (1,900 teens and 600 adults). Registrations for the rally were so numerous that all the available slots filled 12 days before the publicized deadline. As a result, 754 (567 teens and 187 adults representing 70 congregations) were not able to be accommodated and unfortunately could not attend the rally. As a symbolic way to show these congregations how sorry we felt about their not getting in, CYD issued certificates for \$25.00 off on the 2005 youth rally fee for the congregations' youth leaders.

At 2,500 participants, this rally represents the largest attended rally of all time. The previous record was 2,228 – Ottawa, 1999. The 2001 rally in Iowa only had 2,100 attend. At 2,500, the Rally Committee felt it had plenty of space reserved. To think that the number could have been over 3,250 is absolutely amazing!

Because so many teens did not get into the Estes Park rally, two alternative rallies have been organized by WELS members. One will be in San Diego, CA and the other in Newport News, VA. CYD is helping them in whatever ways we can. Check out all the rallies' information at <www.welsyouthrally.net>.

The 2003 International Youth Rally in Estes Park has as its theme, "Nothing Higher," with sub-themes, "God's Power Is Matchless, God's Presence Is Miraculous, God's Purpose Is Made Known." Pastor John Boggs (Mobile, AL) will present three spiritual and inspirational talks on the theme and sub-themes followed by small group Bible study and discussion. Also for this rally, a greater emphasis has been put on personal, spiritual reflection. A very unique and contemplative Taizé style opening worship service and a very up-beat closing worship service will resonate with teens. Time will also be allotted for individual congregation youth group members to come together for sharing, prayer, and planning on how to continue the "Nothing Higher" experience once they return home. At the rally, youth groups will also be invited to submit ideas and suggestions for improving the next youth rally as well as CYD ministry to teens and families. Outstanding submissions will compete for grants of up to \$500 each.

Calling All Content

The WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship has a web site for teens called *LivingBold* (www.livingbold.net). We will be making some major revisions to the site, based on input we have received from a "think tank" of WELS teens from various area Lutheran high schools around the synod. CYD will be launching the "new" look site in late August/early September with various promotional pieces coming to you and your congregations.

In the mean time, *LivingBold* (www.livingbold.net) invites teens from around the country to submit original stories, poems, art, photography, cartoons, streaming video, and spiritual articles for inclusion on the newly redesigned LB web site. The submissions must be made electronically to <cyd@sab.wels.net> and include the author's/artist's name, address, phone number, email address, name of your congregation, high school name, and year of the student in school. All submissions included on the site will receive a cash honorarium (amount yet to be determined) and the oods and aaahs of teens from around the world.

This new aspect of *LivingBold* will be a great opportunity to showcase the God-given talents your teens have. The new teen content will also make *LivingBold* a more exciting site for teens to visit. **Would you please make mention of our desire for original teen content in your communications with your teens?** Also, if any of you care to make submissions, we'd be glad to consider them. THANKS!



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Commission on Youth Discipleship

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One of four tracts designed to promote Sunday school

Item Number: OL-383107 Price: \$0.15

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Learn to teach Sunday school lessons

Item Number: OL-383086 Price: \$24.95

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A Flame That Spread Into A

by Noel and Becky Schrottenboer



For the past year St. John's Church in Lannon, Wisconsin has had continued growth in its youth group called, *Wildfire*. The leaders, Noel & Becky Schrottenboer, Kevin Festerling, and Laura Kveen got together a year ago and decided to start a weekly youth group. Why weekly? Youth need a weekly program to aid in building and strengthening Christian faith and friendships. Christian friendships hold them more accountable for their words and actions. A weekly program is not easily forgotten or passed over for other activities. The leaders understand what a critical time this is in their lives and cannot stress enough how important these meetings are.

Wildfire started last summer and meets every Sunday night from 6 pm–9 pm. The aim was to provide a purpose driven youth ministry. (Recommended reading: *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry* by Doug Fields) With this goal in mind, a mission statement using the word FLAME (because we are flames of Christ) was developed to support this idea: Wildfire exists to create Christian Friendships, Live for Jesus through serving others, Announce Jesus to the community to save the lost, learn more about our Lord through Ministry, and Exalt Him with praise and worship. The five purposes listed above make up the acronym FLAME. When the mission statement was introduced to the youth, they came up with the name *Wildfire* which reflects their mission statement. When the meetings first started there were eight to ten students who attended every week and it has continued to grow to about 30 every week.

What does Wildfire do at these weekly meetings? A typical night at Wildfire starts off with a little hang out time while people arrive. Next we open up with some prayer. Then comes the icebreaker. The icebreaker is usually a game of some sort that helps the kids get to know one another or just a game to get things going with a lot of fun. Then we praise our Lord singing familiar contemporary Christian songs. Once our hearts and minds are prepared, we get into God's word together through an open devotional discussion. The devotions are prepared to be

relevant to their lives and include topics such as friendship, respect, letting your light shine to others, pride, wholesome talk, and drugs and alcohol. Each topic is related to our five purposes, thus being a purpose driven ministry. The open discussion format is used to encourage the youth to share their thoughts, ideas, questions, and stories. It is a safe place where they can openly and freely express their feelings and personal experiences. After devotion we break for snacks and free time. This gives the kids more of a chance to get to know one another and build Christian friendships, while getting exposure to some new Christian music like Relient K or 12 Stones. We often end the last half hour of the night playing games in the gym like dodge ball or basketball. The night is concluded with prayer. Wildfire is successful for a number of reasons, first and foremost prayer. The power of God is amazing. Secondly, it is successful because of the relationships that are established between the youth leaders and the students. When a youth leader (regardless of age) takes an interest in a student's life, and that student sees that they are truly cared about as an individual, they want to keep coming back. For example,

weekly attendance is taken and when an individual has not come for a few weeks an e-mail is sent checking to see how they are doing. E-mails are also followed up by phone calls. Another thing that makes Wildfire successful is that the topics, discussions, and atmosphere are relevant and meaningful in their lives. The youth are taught and motivated by the principles of God's awesome grace. Finally what makes Wildfire successful is the prayer and support of our congregation. St. John's understands that the youth is not just the future of the church, but they are a part of the church right now. Their talents and opinions are valued.

We are so blessed to be a part of this ministry and to be a part of these student's lives. When starting this youth group our hope was that they could learn and benefit from our experiences. Little did we know how much more we would learn from them. For more information go to our website at <www.execpc.com/~noel/sjy> or call us at (262) 251-3858.

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| F | <i>Create Christian Friendships</i> |
| L | <i>Live for Jesus through serving others</i> |
| A | <i>Announce Jesus to the community to save the lost</i> |
| M | <i>Learn more about our Lord through Ministry</i> |
| E | <i>Exalt him with praise and worship</i> |



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Commission on Youth Discipleship**

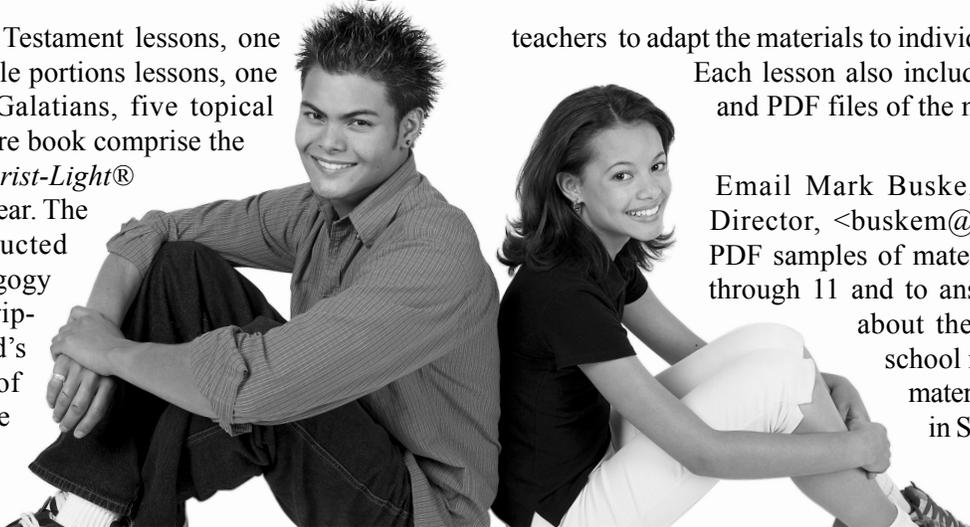
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REACH!

More Teen/High School Bible Studies

Three sets of New Testament lessons, one set of treasured Bible portions lessons, one set of lessons on Galatians, five topical courses, and one core book comprise the new releases for *Christ-Light*® teen materials this year. The lessons are constructed around a solid pedagogy that penetrates Scripture and applies God's Word to the lives of the students. The flexible copy master format allows



teachers to adapt the materials to individual teaching styles. Each lesson also includes a CD with RTF and PDF files of the material.

Email Mark Buske, NPH Marketing Director, <buskem@nph.wels.net> for PDF samples of materials from grades 9 through 11 and to answer any questions about the *Christ-Light* high school materials. Grade 12 materials will be available in Spring 2004.

Service Trips for Teens

Want to have your group experience the personal and spiritual growth that comes from serving others on a special national or international mission/service trip? Contact Pastor Richard Warnecke, Administrator of Faith in Action at WELS Kingdom Workers. Call 414-771-6848 or email: fia@wkw.wels.net.

Please contact us with any questions or for further information.

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