



REACH!

Produced by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Commission on Youth Discipleship

Teens Want More Than Predictability

by Vicar Jeremy Laitinen – Peace Lutheran Church, Sun Prairie, WI

How do the teens at your church approach their study of Scripture? Most teen leaders struggle between providing vital truths of Scripture and presenting those truths in a “relevant” and “appealing” way. In an attempt to keep young people interested in Sunday school, many studies focus on Scripture in a topical way. What does the Bible say about drugs and alcohol, pre-marital sex, peer pressure, parents, problems at school, physical and verbal abuse, and the list could go on and on. While studies like these might serve a good purpose, leaders don’t always need to find the happy medium between scriptural truths and “appealing” contexts.

In one case, the scriptural truths themselves were the appealing context. A group of young people at Grace Lutheran Church in Milwaukee grew tired of conventional teen Bible studies. They detected a certain predictability in the syllabus for their lessons on Sunday morning. One young girl spoke for the group when she described previous courses of study. She said they all basically boiled down to, “High school stinks. Life is crummy. But stick with God and He’ll get you through it

all.” Do studies like these sound familiar? What do your teens think of them? Ask them. Find out what they want.

In the case of the teens at Grace, they wanted something more, something deeper. They asked for Bible studies that delved into official Christian doctrine, Dogmatics, theological meat. Their teacher opted for WELS Christ-Light® series, and a set on Christian Doctrine. These teens planned to cover the following fourteen lessons: Inspiration, Inerrancy and Infallibility of Scripture; Natural and Revealed Knowledge of God; Angels and Demons; Christology; Conversion and Election; Law and Gospel; Justification and Sanctification; Old Adam and New Self; The Sacraments; Christian Prayer; Church Fellowship; The Roles of Man and Woman; Confession and Absolution; and Eschatology. We would all probably admit that the average layperson doesn’t throw around some of those terms in normal conversation. And yet, some teens want to learn about these things.

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and ideas for future issues can be directed to . . .

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Nominate a Teen for 2009

Three WELS teens will be appointed to the 2009 International Youth Rally Planning Committee by the WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship. The Youth Rally Planning Committee visits prospective rally sites, selects the sites, determines the rally schedule and program, and helps to oversee rally planning and administration. Using the nomination forms found at www.welsyouthrally.net, WELS pastors, youth leaders, other adults, or congregational youth groups can nominate a teen to serve on this national committee.

Teen members of the 2009 International Youth Rally Planning Committee must be in grade 10 or 11 at the time of nomination and will serve from the time of their appointment until the end of the Youth Rally they have helped to plan. A teen may serve on the Youth Rally Planning Committee only one time.

To serve as a teen member of the WELS International Youth Rally Planning Committee, a teen must be...

1. A confirmed member in good standing in his/her WELS congregation, faithfully partaking of the Means of Grace,
2. A spiritual teen, modeling Jesus in his/her speech, conduct, attitudes, activities, and behavior,
3. An active participant in the youth ministry and/or general ministry of his/her local congregation,
4. A person who can adequately represent WELS teens and effectively communicate their points of view,
5. An organized and reliable person, able to accept assignments and follow through on their completion.

If you'd like to nominate a teen to serve on the 2009 International Youth Rally Planning Committee, go to www.welsyouthrally.net, click on the "Join the 2009 Team" link at the right, and download the appropriate nomination forms. Deadline for forms submission is October 1, 2007.

Principles for Building Youth Group Unity

Over the next two issues we'll share 8 principles for building unity in your youth group. Apply the principles and you may see some real improvement.

Principle 1: Help teens feel included.

No one really wants to be an outsider. Find ways to help everyone who attends your meetings/activities feel like part of the group.

Principle 2: Help teens feel safe.

Teens who feel threatened by you or other teens aren't likely to keep coming. Create an atmosphere that promotes intimacy, but also protects teens' right to privacy.

Principle 3: See teens as individuals.

Not every teenager learns the same way. Vary your meetings to help teens learn through several different methods.

Principle 4: Confront problems quickly.

Problems won't just go away. And problems that aren't dealt with will eventually bring disunity. Confront problems in your group with honesty, gentleness, love, prayer, and the power of the Gospel.



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In the end, teens who study topics like these don't really learn anything drastically different than what they cover in confirmation class. Most likely they simply look at what they already know from a different angle (which also meets a primary objective of good teaching – elaborate review). Teachers also benefit from leading such a class, especially since they can't logistically attend Sunday morning adult Bible class on a regular basis.

Does your teen Bible class have to look like the one at Grace? No, but experience shows that teens demand more. It may seem like they don't care, but in many cases they want to dig deeper. They demand more of their leaders. They demand more of themselves. Although they may not realize it, they want you to demand more of them. Don't be afraid to take them deeper and challenge them.



Rally Open Space: Sharing and Understanding on Many Levels

by Mr. Jeremy Bakken – Administrative Assistant, Commission on Youth Discipleship

The 2007 WELS International Youth Rally, held July 4-7 in Dallas, TX, was a tremendous success. The program of events included dynamic speakers, large-scale worship experiences, and lots of time for spiritual growth and fellowship for both teens and adults from across the United States and Canada.

This year's schedule included something called Open Space. Unique in design, Open Space was a series of 26 pre-determined topics and seven formal presentations with the following structure:

- Go to any/all topics/presentations you wish to
- Whoever shows up is who should have shown up
- Stay as long or as short as you like at one and move on to another
- Everyone who wishes to speak should be allowed to
- Interact as equals – neither teens nor adults should dominate a discussion
- Judge the words spoken, not the speaker
- Respect others when listening and speaking
- Use the Open Space as a time to share, learn, and grow
- Reflect Jesus

Most sessions did not have any formal presentation, only a facilitator to maintain order and get the discussion going/keep it on track. The purpose was to promote Christian dialog among the equally valuable yet unique members of the body of Christ. The feedback suggests this format to be hugely successful. Here are some of the highlights:

Where to go/what to do for the 2009 Youth Rally

Enthusiastic discussion included some feasible and some not-so feasible suggestions. Locations suggested ranged

from California to New York, or a cruise ship! Programming suggestions included some practical points as well as many entertainment options.

Why are parents and other adults so dumb?

Many teens found this a place to tactfully express their frustrations with the adults in their life, while adults found it a place to better understand the teen mindset. Embarrassment and communication were the two main discussion topics.

Want to learn some awesome youth group activities?

Lots of sharing occurred here, including basic framework for teen group programming and tons of great specific ideas to captivate teens.

Why do young people leave WELS?

Discussion centered around the findings of the Commission on Youth Discipleship study. Participants discussed ways to combat this alarming fact.

How are you sharing your faith?

Participants discussed many practical ways to share faith personally or as a church family within their community.

Are MySpace and similar Web “communities” appropriate for Christian youth?

One of the most popular topics at the rally, the pros and cons of these sites were discussed at length.

Discussion summaries for many of the topics can be found on the WELS Youth Rally Web site at www.welsyouthrally.net by clicking “Open Space Comments Summary” on the right side. You can also find other exciting details about the 2009 rally there.

Check This Out!

Consider joining the national “Make a Difference Day” on October 28, 2007, by having your group get involved in some service activity in your community. You can learn more about “Make a Difference Day” and obtain all kinds of ideas at www.usaweekend.com/diffday/index.html. This is not a WELS organization or effort, but could provide your group with some neat ideas/involvement. Another option is Thrivent’s “Join Hands Day” (www.joinhandsday.org) which offers similar planning help but also encourages intergenerational work.

WELS Pastor and Northern Wisconsin CYD District Coordinator, Ben Berger says, “Either event would be a good suggestion to any WELS groups looking to include a service project. I don’t see any fellowship issues since each church group can do its own project.”

How to Protect Yourself and Your Volunteers

by Lynn Klammer and Lisa Cogliandro

In our work with youth ministers and teens, we have repeatedly found that basic knowledge of legal issues is lacking. In this litigious society, it is extremely hazardous to engage in people-oriented work without knowledge of how to protect your organization and the people who volunteer within it. An essential component of developing any quality volunteer-based program, therefore, is a foundational understanding, by all involved, of issues such as “duty to warn,” laws regarding minors, and liability insurance. You will need to grasp each of these issues from both a volunteer and an organizational perspective. In this way, you free up your volunteers to engage in their outreach with a clear sense of the legal parameters within which they move.

Protecting yourself from liability involves protecting those your organization serves as well as the volunteers who provide the service. Often volunteers are not the focus of concern because the threat of litigation is usually viewed as originating outside the organization. However, volunteers who are engaged in activities such as manual labor, transportation and other physically demanding tasks, are especially at risk for injury and are therefore possible litigation risks.

The more obvious area of liability concern is related to those your organization serves. Clear, written guidelines for your volunteers will help you avoid problems. Issues such as confidentiality, record keeping requirements and guidelines for dealing with emergency situations must all be included in your written guidelines. Other issues include requirements of volunteers who provide transportation for clients, obtain-

ing a client’s written permission before sharing confidential information, and when confidentiality must be broken without permission. Furthermore, keeping an attorney on retainer, or finding one or two who will volunteer their time can be cost effective ways of avoiding disaster.

If you’re volunteer work involves children and/or teens, there are several legal and ethical issues to consider that are unique to that particular population. Be aware that legal parameters will vary from state to state. In our work with teens, we found that “duty to warn” was a consideration. “Duty to warn” involves the requirement of specified professionals to report any harm, or threat of harm to a minor. It also includes the need to report anyone (adult or minor) who is a danger to themselves or others. A 16-year-old threatening suicide or a 14-year-old who is being abused at

home are both examples of cases involving minors that would need to be reported. It is important to note that even though your volunteers may not be required by law to adhere to “duty to warn,” or other similar requirements, it may be something that you ethically choose to follow. Be aware that the decision to break confidentiality will be a difficult one, and even within the parameters of the “duty to warn” requirements, volunteers may be resistant to following your guidelines. For this reason, it is imperative that volunteers be given sufficient training regarding the benefits to the client when breaking confidentiality, as well as ongoing support for the volunteer following such

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a situation. In our work with volunteers we have noticed that many experience feelings such as guilt, remorse and anger after breaking the confidence of their client. Providing your volunteers with a supportive environment to express their feelings will help to ensure that they will continue to follow your guidelines with future clients.

Liability will always be a top concern of your organization. Your volunteers, inasmuch as their activities expose them, need to know the ways in which your liability insurance protects them and those they serve. In our own organization, volunteers are given the same protections as employees as long as they are acting under the auspices of the organization/program. Be sure to check with local and state insurance regulations for certain things such as the amount and type of car insurance volunteers must carry in order to legally transport minors. Allowing a volunteer to provide transportation without the required private coverage puts both your volunteer and your organization at greater risk of personal liability. You might have transportation providers complete a driver information sheet, stating all licensing, registration and insurance information; and in some cases you may wish to have a policy of regular driver's record checks on your volunteers (you must obtain their written permission to do this). The key to liability is to foresee problem areas, take preventative measures to avoid incidents, and carry appropriate insurance coverage.

We hope that this brief review of some liability issues will assist you as you work with volunteers and clients. It can be difficult to attend to the seemingly endless possible liability risks that exist in this crazy world, especially when the needs we are trying to fulfill are so prominent. However, attending to liability issues will help to ensure that your organization continues to exist and thrive as it serves those in need.

Points to Ponder:

- 1) Have realistic expectations, even when your volunteers don't. Many times the enthusiasm of volunteers leads them to over-commit. Even though you may be in great need of the added time and effort offered, strive to not over-burden your volunteers. You may gain in the short-term, but lose in the long-term if they "burn out".
- 2) Remember the power of praise. A happy volunteer is a productive volunteer, and more importantly, a confident one. A volunteer who feels valued and respected is more likely to come to you with mistakes or concerns. Fore warning of potential problems can be a liability lifesaver.
- 3) Get everything in writing. Even the most mundane issues can be easily misunderstood. Make sure you write down everything you expect from your volunteers, and have them sign to indicate their understanding of your policy. Don't have a written policy? Get one. Simply sitting down and discussing what needs to be done falls far short of meeting the needs of both organization and individual volunteer.
- 4) Commitments make for a committed volunteer. Insist that your volunteers "sign on" for a specific amount of time. Approaching the volunteer position in a professional manner, makes the volunteer feel more important and more likely to approach their duties in a responsible manner.
- 5) Safety first. In many of the organizations I have served, security checks were standard practice. Even if you don't formally want to do this, at least ask the right questions. You'd be surprised how many people will tell you incredibly personal information just by being asked. One man, who I was meeting with for the first time to work on a referral line, told me that he had been convicted of a felony years before (and that's before he knew that I intended to run a security check). Don't be afraid to ask the tough questions. Remember, these are the people who will be representing your organization. They should be treated in the way they are expected to conduct themselves—as professionals.

Lynn Klammer is a member of St. Johns Lutheran Church in Frankenmuth, MI and a licensed clinical psychologist, educator and author. She has worked in a variety of volunteer services (domestic violence shelters, sexual assault clinics, etc.), but at present (and for the past 17 years) has been with a local parish health ministry. She is also the youth advisor at St. Johns.

Lisa Cogliandro is a Catholic nun with extensive experience in youth ministry. At the time the article was written she served in the Office of Christian Service for the Catholic Diocese of Saginaw, MI.

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Did You Know?

★ Current data indicates that WELS has about 22,000 teens of high school age. Of these, about 6,500 (30%) attend WELS area Lutheran high schools (5,912) or a WELS preparatory school (624). That leaves about 15,500 teens in other secondary education settings. Other than public high schools (the largest group), or WELS high/prep schools (next largest group), WELS teens also attend the following secondary education options, according to the recent CYD online survey:

- Other Lutheran high schools (non-WELS)
- Christian but not Lutheran high schools
- Private but not Christian high schools
- Home schooled
- Dropped out

★ Of WELS 1,276 congregations only 245 (19.2%) sent youth to the 2007 International Youth Rally in Dallas, TX. 1,567 teens and 509 adults attended the “Laugh Out Loud” rally in Dallas, TX, July 4-7.

★ The results from the 2007 Survey of WELS Teens (www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship) found 72% of the 430 respondents preferring public/group worship that was described in these two ways: a) creative worship using the hymnal along with a variety of other resources, led often by an organ but also regularly involving other instruments-51%, and b) contemporary worship, informal, with nothing from the hymnal, with praise choruses and a praise band of various instruments-21%. Only 12% preferred historic worship using only the orders of service and hymns from the hymnal, led by an organ. 16% were unsure.

★ The results from the 2007 Survey of WELS Teens found 35% of the 430 participants hesitant to share/not sharing their faith with family, 61% hesitant to share/not sharing their faith with friends, and 85% hesitant to share/not sharing their faith with people they don’t know/strangers.

Please contact us with any questions or for further information.