



REACH!

Produced by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Commission on Youth Discipleship

Duplicity in the Data

by Dr. Joel Nelson, Administrator – WELS Youth Discipleship

There is a short video titled “Don’t Be a Statistic” (You can view the video at www.bluefishtv.com. Enter the video title into the search box.) In the video, this data is shared:

- 3000 teens/day get pregnant; 1 every 2 minutes.
- 1 out of 4 freshman and 3 out of 4 seniors are sexually active.
- 3 out of 10 teens are caught up in gang activity and violence.
- 3000 teens/day are addicted to harmful substances.
- 8 teens/day will die in alcohol related auto crashes.
- 10% of teens will drop out of school completely.

The video does not hold back. Youth today face many challenges and temptations. The statistics clearly show that many youth are not following the path that God wants them to follow.

Another short video from LivingBold’s *Everyday* series is titled “Be Prepared” (You can view the video at http://streams.wels.net/video/be_prepared?). This video also shares some troubling data.

- Of 400 WELS teens surveyed, 94.8% said their faith was strong or pretty strong.
- Of this same sample, 74.3% said they sometimes, rarely, or never talk about God and spiritual matters with others.

According to this data, three-fourths of WELS teens say their faith is strong, but they don’t talk about it with others. What’s your reaction to this duplicity?

As I ponder the numbers from these two videos, I can’t help but feel that improvement in the “Be Prepared” data would also improve the “Don’t Be a Statistic” data. More

WELS teens openly and passionately talking about God and spiritual matters with their peers—sharing the gospel and its incredible power—would just have to reduce the grim, negative outcomes so

often seen for teens today.

WELS congregations do indeed have many teens whose faith is strong. Let’s do all we can to educate, encourage, and engage them in sharing this faith. The souls of their friends, and maybe even theirs, are at stake.



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

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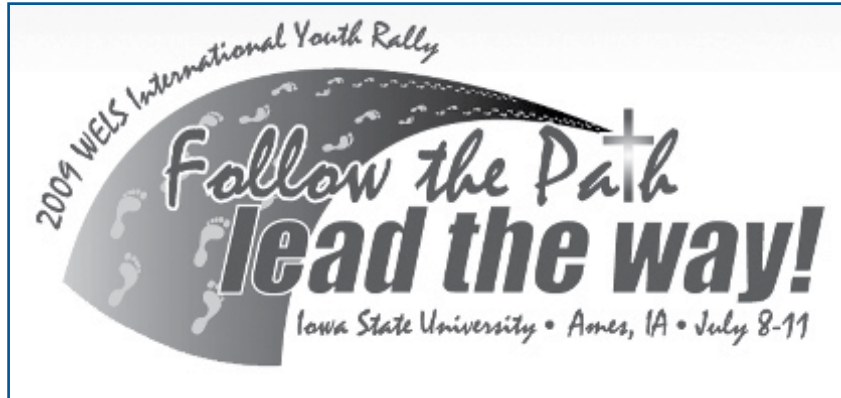
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“Follow the Path, Lead the Way”

by Dr. Joel A. Nelson

The 2009 WELS International Youth Rally is history, and what a rally it was!

- A timely theme (Follow the Path, Lead the Way) and Bible connection (1 Timothy 4:12): “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.”
- 1,431 participants (1,062 teens/369 adults)—lowest count since CYD has taken it over, but arguably the best rally of the four I have overseen.
- Truly international with eight countries represented—a rally first! (Brazil, Canada, Grenada, Malawi, Pakistan, Taiwan, USA, Zambia).
- A great location—the beautiful campus of Iowa State University with an absolutely incredible staff, top to bottom.
- Nice weather—at least for everything we had planned outside which is when it mattered most!
- Wonderful worship leaders and keynote speakers who really took their assigned themes and “hit it out of the park.”
- Two incredible teens on the Rally Planning Committee—CJ Fischer (Sartell, MN) and Nicole Livigne (Jupiter, FL)—who lived the rally theme behind the scenes and out front for their two year term.



- Truly meaningful service projects with 23 entities around Ames and Des Moines, IA.
- 41 different Power Point and/or video presentations.
- Great small group breakout sessions, mixing people from all over.
- Splendid partnerships: CYD with WELS Board for World

Missions, Emanuel Lutheran Church—New London, WI with the youth group from Grenada, WELS Campus Ministry, Martin Luther College, Wisconsin Lutheran College, Bethany Lutheran College, NPH, and many more.

- An amazing concert from Chapter 6 (www.chapter6.com).

I could go on, but it might be more fun for you to go to the special post-rally Web page and see for yourself (www.welsyouthrally.net).

While it’s always great to have a rally over with, because of all the intense work, it’s also a let-down, because of all the wonderful blessings God allows to flow from a rally experience.

Stay tuned for news about 2011!

It Is Finished

After roughly eight years of effort, the WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship (CYD) and its Confirmation Ministry Task Force (CMTF), have completed the Confirmation Ministry Self-Study: A Process to Help Congregations Reflect, Evaluate, and Improve. This resource was developed after a synod-wide survey, follow-up study, and thorough discussion by CYD and the CMTF, led to the conclusion that a self-study process would best assist WELS congregations. When used as designed, this resource will help congregation leaders to reflect, evaluate, and improve their congregation’s Confirmation ministry.

The Confirmation Ministry Self-Study has two components: 1) a DVD encouraging evaluation of Confirmation practices, showcasing new models/approaches used around WELS, and providing helps for using the self-study materials, and 2) a CD containing the directions, worksheets, and templates needed to conduct the self-study. Also, a special Web area of additional resources from around WELS has been created at www.wels.net/confirmation.

Order the Confirmation Ministry Self-Study from Northwestern Publishing House. Cost: \$14.95 (#38-3113).

Could Teens Take the Lead in Your Setting?

Teenagers can play a key role in ministries to younger children—and not just as assistants. Teens can be given leadership roles, even putting them in charge of adult volunteers. If McDonald's and similar establishments think teens can handle larger roles—assigning them assistant manager duties at 16-17 year olds—why can't the church? George Barna in *Transforming Your Children into Spiritual Champions* (2003) adds this:

Research reveals that adult church leaders usually have serious involvement in church life and training when they are young. The statistics gathered among a national sample of pastors, church staff and lay leaders showed that more than four out of five of those leaders had consistently been involved in the ministry [of the church]... One implication is that the individuals who will become the church's leaders two decades from now are probably active in church programs today.

Though we may disagree with some of the doctrinal positions of other denominations or churches, some of them seem to really appreciate the value teens can have in their ministries to younger children. Here are some examples:

- Eagle Brook Church (Baptist) which has three locations near Minneapolis, began growing faster than its support systems could keep up. That led to “a significant volunteer deficit,” in the early childhood ministries. Teenagers' availability, combined with their energy, offered a win-win solution.
- Lakewood Church (non-denominational) in Houston, recently moved into larger facilities and its children's ministry grew by 1,400—in one weekend. “One of our greatest resources was all our excited teenagers,” says the senior director of family ministries. “We knew we could help our program and develop our young people at the same time. These volunteers have revolutionized Lakewood's children's ministry, which would struggle without them,” he says.
- Kingdom Life Christian Church (non-denominational) in Milford, Connecticut, has always used young volunteers. But eight years ago, church leaders started entrusting them with more responsibilities and tracking their performance. “We wanted teenagers to have a place to put into practice what they were learning in youth group, to be able to enter into our church's volunteer culture now and not wait until adulthood,” says an associate pastor.

No matter how teen-volunteer programs start, experts agree they have tremendous advantages for everyone involved: Good for young people, for children, for families, and for churches.

Experts have found the benefits of using teenagers far outweigh obstacles. With guidance, teenagers can do amazing things in your ministry while being transformed into ministers themselves. Why not think about it. Better yet, give it a try and then send REACH! your story.

Some excerpts in this article are from Children's Ministry Magazine (www.childrensministry.com), a leading resource for people who serve children in the church.

Another Country Heard From

Dear Dr. Nelson [and members of the rally team]:

Thank you so much for all you did to make the 2009 Youth Rally an awesome, praise God experience!!! My daughter, Hannah, and I were really encouraged spiritually and emotionally by being at the rally with so many other WELS youth and fellow missionary kids. Thank you for all you did to make this experience so uplifting, well-run, and joyful! May God continue to richly bless you in your ministry.

*In Christian love,
Sarah Stellick
(Taichung, Taiwan)*



Part 5 Survey Says . . .

In the last four issues of REACH!, we shared survey responses from 117 WELS pastors and youth leaders. In this issue we continue by sharing their responses to this question:

Survey question

“What do you feel are the top three things a youth worker needs to do to prepare himself/herself for working with teens?”

(Some of the best answers follow.)

- They do NOT fit one mold; you must have several different avenues to talk/deal with them. Don't pigeon-hole them; they are full of surprises.
- Have really good ice-breakers in your arsenal.
- Form open and honest relationships with the teens that extend outside the Bible class.
- Develop people skills in general. More specifically with teens, be ready to speak about what they know and what's going on in their lives.
- Spend time at teen functions. Read material that explains how a teenager's mind works. Determine what topics will interest teens and research those ideas. Take time to observe and participate with someone who is effective with teens.
- Express compassion and confidentiality. You especially want teens to come to you if they are “troubled” and they won't do so if they feel their discussions are not in confidence.
- Learn how to get the teens to relax as a group, get them to speak up in gatherings/meetings, and help them feel that they are part of the group of teens.
- Know God's Word. Love them. Listen to them.
- Embrace your inner teen and decide that you are going to have fun with them. You don't have to create enthusiasm, you only need to direct it. Accept a little bit of chaos.
- See the teens' parents as crucial partners in ministering to the teens. They know their children the best and have by far the greatest impact on their children. Also, enlist them to work alongside of you, so you're not trying to do this alone. You shouldn't have to.
- Understand that they are looking for ways to apply their Christian knowledge to life. How to walk the walk, not just talk the talk.
- Realize that there will be great diversity in where the kids are in their Christian walk. Some will “get it” more than others. Being able to reach everybody, while difficult, is important. Some need “milk,” others “solid food.” This also has to do with kids that attend public schools and prep/Christian schools. While they do have many similar pressures, some are different. Realize this and try to prepare for it.
- Do some research on teens and youth ministry. What is working, what isn't. There are so many great resources out there to utilize if you are struggling with ideas. Let the kids “lead” where the class is going - are they more interested and engaged in discussions on drugs, friendships, dating? Or are they more interested and engaged in dissecting Scripture and then direct application to life?
- Treat them as valuable, listen to what they say as if you were listening to an adult and respond respectfully.
- Find ways to involve youth in activities by incorporating them with “adult” tasks at church...don't assign menial or unwanted tasks to the Youth Group because the adults don't want to do them. Work with teens as junior members of a team—they are the future leaders of the congregation!
- Teens observe and absorb a lot more than you think. Keep in touch with them when they start drifting-- don't take it as a personal insult—we need to work twice as hard to strengthen the church family's relationship with them and interest in them as they graduate from high school and head to college!
- Be yourself, don't try to be Mr./Mrs. Youth Leader who has all the gimmicks; either you are good with working with teens or you aren't. Teens can smell a fake a mile away.
- Be comfortable with technology. Be down to earth. Show that you have not been perfect as a kid.
- Get to know the teens by name and take an interest in their lives outside of congregational activities. Be an adult, not a 25-year old teenager. The teens will respect you much more if you are yourself. Model the importance of repentance, forgiveness, patience, and regular Bible study.
- Be well-prepared before you stand in front of them. Never fly by the seat of your pants.

Check These Out!

- 1** Have you looked at CONNECTWITHKIDS.COM? Some great, short videos and articles on what's going on with youth today. The content comes from a secular perspective and is not a religious Web site. Be discerning. Some great insights and education can be found there.
- 2** Learn about the WELS Prison Ministry "Reaching Behind the Bars" Pen Pal Program, and then get your teens involved. A book of guidelines can be obtained from WELS Prison Ministry: 507-354-3130 or welspm@newulmtel.net.
- 3** Need resources and ideas for conducting "blended" worship, or worship that, "blends Lutheran doctrine and gospel proclamation with a contemporary style of music"? Mr. John Kehl, WELS member (Mt. Olive, Appleton, WI) and brother of Pastor Dave Kehl, WELS Administrator for Adult Discipleship, has started a Web site to share resources, ideas, evaluations, and more: <http://blendedworshipresource.wordpress.com/>.
- 4** Learn interactive games that have a higher purpose. A great source for these kinds of games is www.thesource4ym.com.
- 5** Watch a short but poignant video from Doug Fields, internationally recognized youth ministry expert, talking about ministry to teens: "For Youth Workers Only: Sacred vs. Secular." Go to www.bluefishtv.com and type "sacred vs. secular" into the search box.
- 6** View past issues of REACH! and subscribe to get it delivered via email at www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship. Click on the "Newsletters" section.



What Teens Want from Parents

- Communicate with us more.
- Listen to us.
- Teach us about sex and drugs.
- Support, accept, encourage, and love us.
- Set a good example.
- Trust, respect, and have faith in us.
- Spend more time with us.
- Stop verbal and physical abuse.

From a RespecTeen national survey of 3,000 high school students in the United States.

HOW TO STAY SAFE IN THE WORLD TODAY!

1. Avoid riding in automobiles, because they are responsible for 20% of all fatal accidents.
2. Do not stay home because 17% of all accidents occur in the home.
3. Avoid walking on streets or sidewalks because 14% of all accidents occur to pedestrians.
4. Avoid traveling by air, rail, or water because 16% of all accidents involve these forms of transportation.
5. Of the remaining 33%, 32% of all deaths occur in hospitals. So, above all else, avoid hospitals.

You will be pleased to learn, however, that only .001% of all deaths occur in worship services in church, and these are usually related to previous physical disorders. Therefore, logic tells us that the safest place for you to be at any given point in time is at church! Bible study is safe too. The percentage of deaths during Bible study is even less.

So, attend church, and read your Bible. IT COULD SAVE YOUR LIFE!

Reaching Young Adults

In his book, *“Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them”* (B&H Books, 2008), Ed Stetzer shares trends from research on 200 churches that are actually reaching young adults. This is what they are doing:

CREATING DEEPER COMMUNITY

Churches that attract and develop young adults, place a high value on moving people into a healthy small group system. Young adults are trying to connect and will make a lasting connection wherever they can find belonging.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE THROUGH SERVICE

Churches that are transforming young adults value leading people to serve through volunteerism. More than being pampered, young adults want to be part of something bigger than themselves and are looking to be part of an organization where they can make a difference through acts of service.

EXPERIENCING WORSHIP

Churches that are engaging young adults are providing worship environments that reflect their culture while also revering and revealing God. More than looking for a good performance, young adults desire to connect with a vertical experience of worship.

LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY

Churches that are reaching young adults are willing to communicate in a language of technology familiar to young adults. Young adults sense that these churches are welcoming churches that value and understand them, engaging them where they are.



A RALLY REACTION:

I attended the rally's for the last 4 years. I admit I was skeptical of this one mainly because of the location. I had been in Texas and was unsure of how Iowa would compare. The experience in Iowa was just as positive as any of the others. I made new friends whom I still text or talk with each day. My shin splints (from all the walking) are still painfully talking to me but the experience still was positive. I left knowing that my decision to be a missionary after high school was the right path for me. Rally's always get me ready for the year ahead this one was no different.

Kodi

BUILDING CROSS-GENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Churches that are linking young adults with older, mature adults are challenging young adults to move on to maturity through friendship, wisdom, and support. Young adults are drawn to churches that believe in them enough to challenge them.

MOVING TOWARD AUTHENTICITY

Churches that are engaging young adults are reaching them not only by their excellence but also by their honesty. Young adults are looking for and connecting to churches where they see leaders that are authentic, transparent, and life-long learners.

LEADING BY TRANSPARENCY

Churches that are influencing young adults highly value an approach to ministry and leadership where leaders are willing to express a personal sense of humanity and vulnerability.

LEADING BY TEAM

Increasingly, churches reaching young adults seem to be taking a team approach to ministry. They see ministry not as a solo venture but as a team sport—and the broader participation it creates increases the impact of ministry.

Please contact us with any questions or for further information.

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