



# REACH!

Produced by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Commission on Youth Discipleship

## The Parable of the People Mover

by Dr. Joel A. Nelson, Administrator – WELS Youth Discipleship

Have you ever been to an airport like Chicago's O'Hare or Denver International and gone on the long people mover that connects concourses? I'm always fascinated by that device and more so, by the people who ride the thing. Some are tightly hanging on like the people mover could suddenly turn into the "Sinister Sinus Smasher" or some other theme park thrill ride. Obviously, these folks haven't been on a people mover before. Other people are just enjoying the ride, not really caring how fast the people mover moves them. They are perfectly content to be slowly, aimlessly swept along. Then there are the individuals who, in addition to being mechanically moved, walk or sometimes even run. These people are either very goal oriented or very late for their next flight.

Every once in a while you see people get half way down the line and then discover they have forgotten something or realize they are



going the wrong way, so they do a 180 and start going back against the normal flow, bumping into everyone and disrupting the passive glide of those moving in the opposite direction. I have even seen people in midstream, looking like something is radically wrong, simply leap over the guardrail and vamoose!

When you ponder it a bit, the mechanical people mover is a pretty good picture of the condition of teens in our world today.

They are moving though life from point A to point B. Some are holding on for dear life because issues, experiences, and relationships past, present, and future scare the daylights out of them. Some teens just kick back and passively let the world around them set their pace and agenda. Others seem to know where they are going but can't get there fast enough. They whip through life in a hurried quest to be something, get something, and know something, but pass up many golden opportunities, tender

### IN THIS ISSUE

Make a Beeline to Jesus.....	2
The "Inner Court" Endorsement.....	3
Sensational Service Projects.....	4
Contemplating Youth Ministry.....	5
Youth Opinoin Matters.....	6

### And More!

Comments about this

## REACH!

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

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moments, and beautiful experiences in the hectic process. And then there are teens that go totally against the normal flow. They are dysfunctional in their living, headed in the wrong direction and bumping into every bad thing that’s out there. They are on a collision course with disaster but seem powerless to stop. Finally, there are teens who just can’t take it anymore. They have lost their will to stick it out, to persevere, so they jump the guardrail, and in one way or another, escape.

I bet you’re saying to yourself, “Joel’s reading an awful lot into a people mover!” But wait, I’m not done yet! Every people mover also has this feature: a calm, reassuring, usually mother-like voice saying at just the right intervals along the path, “Please stay to the right. Please look down. Please watch your step.” There must be something to this. The research and development departments at “People Movers-R-Us” must know that these reassuring messages are vital to the smooth, safe running of the device. They must know that ordinary people frequently cannot grasp the most elementary of processes and need direction if they are to get safely from point A to point B. The people mover experts understand that external direction is frequently required.

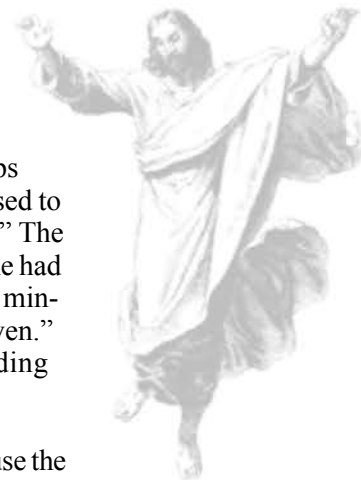
External direction is required when it comes to teens. And what a privilege it is for you to be able to provide it to them. As a Christian youth leader, you have the awesome opportunity to move along through life, side by side, with them. You have the God-given tool, the Bible, which can be used to help them get safely from point A to point B—not just from day to day, but also from the present to the everlasting.

When you tell teens God’s Word, when you model its importance in your life and the life of your own family, when you pray for them and with them, when you radiate the joy that’s yours in Jesus, and when you patiently share your time and life with them, you are providing external direction that’s helping to move teens in the way God wants them to go. Like the reassuring voice in the mechanical people mover, you are being a reassuring voice that says, “Jesus and I will help you to watch your step. And please, will you and Jesus help me to watch mine?”

## Make a Beeline to Jesus

*Adapted from “The Beeline” by Rick Lawrence, [www.youthministry.com](http://www.youthministry.com), 2006.*

A national youth ministry speaker was doing a workshop at a big convention. He told how a youth worker had come up to him during a break. This guy said to him, “You know, all your tips and advice are fine, but aren’t we supposed to be focusing on Jesus in youth ministry?” The speaker smiled and told the crowd how he had responded to the guy: “Of course youth ministry is about Jesus—c’mon, that’s a given.” That produced a lot of smiling, nodding heads in the crowd.



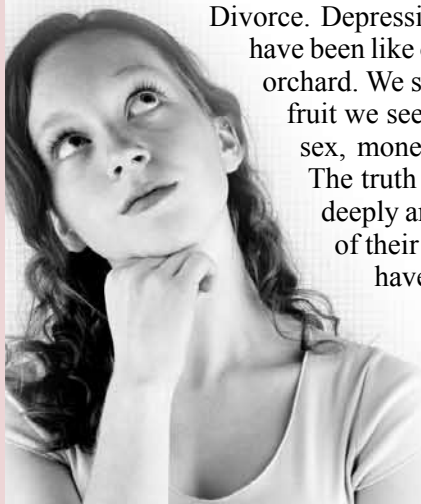
This story should make us nervous, because the hard evidence proves that speaker was dead wrong. Despite our best efforts—all our training, commitment, resources, and creativity—today’s children and youth are just not getting who Jesus really is. And very few of them are living their relationship with Christ in their everyday life.

According to the National Study of Youth and Religion ([www.youthandreligion.org](http://www.youthandreligion.org)), 9 out of 10 American young people don’t have what social researchers call a “devoted” faith—which means their faith in Christ is not central to their life; they don’t know the basics of their faith; and they don’t see how their relationship with Jesus makes an impact in their everyday life. Interestingly enough, the adults interviewed in the study were exactly the same.

That’s why it’s time to get radical: Never again teach from the Bible, or plan a Bible study, or do a topical study, without making a beeline to Jesus. If what you’ve planned has no apparent connection to Jesus, ask God to help you find it. John’s gospel tells us Jesus is “the Word”—that means His fingerprints are all over the Bible. There’s a built-in beeline to Jesus no matter where you go in Scripture. It’s our calling (and an adventure) to find it.

So if we’re always making a beeline to Jesus, what do we do about the issues—the problems and challenges—facing our teenagers? Drug and alcohol abuse. Sexual activity. The push to succeed. Divorce. Depression. Stress. Up until now most of us have been like overworked pruners in a fast-growing orchard. We scurry around trying to cut off the bad fruit we see around us. We do teaching series on sex, money, music, movies, and relationships. The truth is, as kids come to know Jesus more deeply and begin to abide in Him as the “root” of their life, their fruit will change. We won’t have to run around cutting off rotten fruit!

That’s not to say we don’t focus on these topics—we just focus on them with the goal of helping kids answer the first and greatest question of life—What has Jesus done for me?



## An “Inner Court” Endorsement

“Inner Court” is the name of the teen Bible study group at Trinity Lutheran Church in Osceola, WI. The group averages about 10 and is a nice mix of public and Lutheran high school teens. Inner Court recently used the *Walk In My World* Bible study series produced by WELS Youth Discipleship and shared their reactions:

Mr. Robert Wells, the adult teacher wrote:

*I would like to offer a personal note of thanks for the Walk In My World video Bible lesson series. I found them well constructed and very user friendly from the lay instructor point of view. We spent much time in our Bibles after viewing each episode. Due to the effects of divorce, we have a number of teens attending Inner Court every other Sunday. The format I chose was to show the video for two Sundays and then move on to the next video. Each lesson was given two 45 minute Sundays. The format worked well and there were enough Bible references that I divided them in half. The issues brought about in the videos are timely for our youth today.*

“Inner Court” teens who participated in the lessons, sent WELS Youth Discipleship hand made thank you cards with comments:

*[Walk In My World] was very inspirational and informative. I'm sure they have helped many people grow closer to God.*

*It is comforting to see other people that have the same problems. The films were done very well. My faith has been truly strengthened.*

*[The DVD episodes] have really inspired me to help people with their problems.*

*This season [edition 2] was a little darker [in subject matter] but it is important to see faith in its many different areas and how it can flourish no matter what “field” it's planted in.*

*I learned many new things. Continue making the series because I can relate the things that are happening in my life and the things that I need help with.*

*It taught me a lot about faith and how to share my faith with others. The stories were interesting and a very good variety.*

*The videos remind me that I am not the only one struggling with issues that life brings. They make me remember that I can always look to God as my refuge and my way out...they remind me to walk with God as I'm walking in my world.*

Thanks to everyone at the “Inner Court” for sharing your evaluations of *Walk In My World*. God-willing more teen groups will consider using this resource because of what you have written. Learn more about *Walk In My World* from Northwestern Publishing House: 1-800-662-6022 or online at [www.nph.net/welsproducts](http://www.nph.net/welsproducts).



Mr. Wells and teen members of the Inner Court

# Sensational Service Projects

Here's one WELS congregation's list of service projects to help pre-teens and teens learn more about their congregation and its ministry. What projects and processes could your congregation develop?

- 1.) **Attend a meeting for a church board, group or organization:** Voters' Assembly, various boards, Sunday school staff, Worship Committee, Outreach Committee, Contributions Committee, Ladies Aid, etc.
- 2.) **Attend a musical group practice:** Mixed Choir, Octet, Treble, Brass, or Handbell Choirs, church organist practice, etc.
- 3.) **Work with a member of the school staff:** janitor, office secretaries, lunch room staff, Maintenance Committee member, etc.
- 4.) **Work at larger congregational events:** Spring workday, congregational dinner, church picnic, Sunday school family picnic, etc.
- 5.) **Visit a shut-in member:** read the Bible to them, offer to do some house or yard work, bake cookies, write letters, etc.
- 6.) **Go on a hospital or outreach call:** read Meditations to the hospitalized, learn how to conduct a friendly visit, etc.
- 7.) **Attend an adult Bible class:** Sundays, Tuesday Ladies, Wednesday morning/evening, Bible Information Class, etc.
- 8.) **Bring a friend or your parents to teen Bible class or to a youth group meeting.**
- 9.) **Interview a church leader:** a pastor, a teacher, an elected or appointed leader.
- 10.) **Participate in the Prayer Chain or start your own:** support hurting people through prayer, reinforce your prayer life, etc.
- 11.) **Baby-sit:** for a church service, after school hours activity, church organization meeting, Bible class, Parent-Teacher group, etc.
- 12.) **Be a teacher's aide:** for Sunday school, Lutheran elementary school, Pioneers, etc.
- 13.) **Assist the Altar Guild:** preparing the altar for worship, filling of cups for Lord's Supper, changing of banners, etc.
- 14.) **Be a "greeter" before a church service:** welcome members and visitors, get to know the congregation, wear a smile, etc.
- 15.) **Attend a "new member welcome":** introduce yourself, visit with new members, get to know each other, be friendly, etc.
- 16.) **Work in the church library:** checking out books, making promotional posters, shelving of books, etc.
- 17.) **Do church/school grounds maintenance:** weeding, trimming, watering plants, picking up paper and trash, etc.
- 18.) **Replenish pew cards:** replace church pew cards (visitor, prayer, & communion cards) sharpen pencils, straighten books, etc.
- 19.) **Pet therapy:** visit nursing homes and group homes with a pet for their enjoyment and provide a "home" atmosphere.

The sky is the limit when it comes to ideas for engaging youth in your congregation's ministry. You will also want to design a process for approving service project requests in advance. No matter what you do, your teens and congregation will experience great blessings.

*"But be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you." 1 Samuel 12:24*



## It's a Miracle!

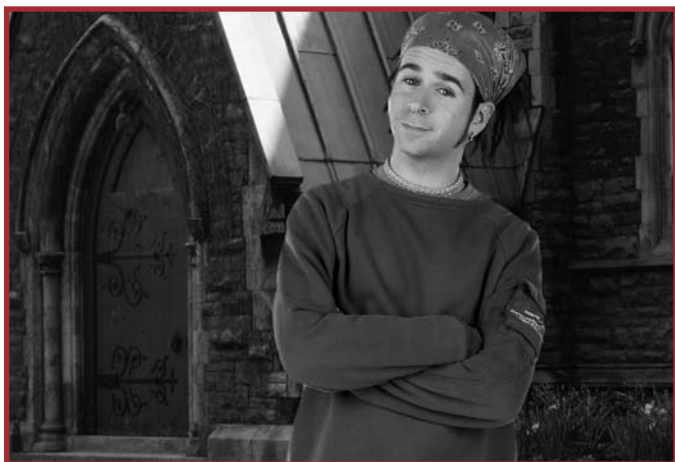
A devout cowboy lost his favorite Bible while he was mending fences out on the range. Three weeks later a cow walked up to him carrying the Bible in its mouth.

The cowboy couldn't believe his eyes. He took the precious book out of the cow's mouth, raised his eyes heavenward, and exclaimed, "It's a miracle!"

"Not really," said the cow. "Your name is written inside the cover."

# Contemplating Youth Ministry

by Professor David Sellnow – Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN



In response to a 2003 WELS Convention resolution, the WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship has done research regarding why teens and young adults leave WELS and their local congregations. You can find the study here: [www.wels.net/jumpword/youth-study](http://www.wels.net/jumpword/youth-study).

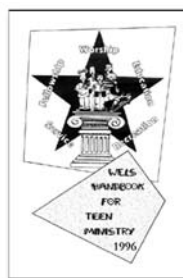
One blogger on the WELS Web log wrote concerning this topic: “I believe the reason why many of our youth are staying away . . . is because they cannot show their thankfulness through their own gifts and ways. . . . If you give the youth all the jobs that no other member or committee wants, the youth will leave.” – *Imprint* <[www.wels.net/wordpress/archives/2005/02/22/youth-leaving-church](http://www.wels.net/wordpress/archives/2005/02/22/youth-leaving-church)> [accessed 20 June 2005]

Certainly in many cases there are deeper spiritual ailments that cause youth to wander away. However, feeling left out is a sentiment I’ve heard expressed by some of our best young adults, a sense of being out of place when they are no longer kids but not yet incorporated as adults. When I asked a group of college students, “What more could our churches do in regard to young people in the church?” these were some of the responses:

- “Well less than half of the youth at my church are thoroughly integrated into the church.”
- “Our churches need to recognize youth as the church of today—not merely the church of the future.”
- “We need to find meaningful ways to *involve* youth in the church, not just to keep youth happy. Youth ministry is too much lock-ins and parties and not enough meaningful involvement.”

According to US Census Bureau estimates at the time, 2006 would be the year with the greatest population of teens in American history (Reid 2004, 35). This data and other indicators should tell us that the time is ripe to give significant attention to how we minister to teenagers and young adults. Those already active in children’s ministries might expand their horizon and strive to keep nurturing those children as they become adults. Called workers in teaching and staff ministry positions can provide an invaluable contribution to the church by assisting in this area of ministry.

A good book for evaluating and planning your congregation’s ministry to and with youth is the *WELS Handbook for Teen Ministry* (WELS Youth Discipleship, 1996), available from Northwestern Publishing House: 1-800-662-6022 or [www.nph.net/welsproducts](http://www.nph.net/welsproducts). Order # 38-3143 \$24.50.



## Reasons Teens Volunteer

A recent article on the Church Volunteer Central Web site ([www.churchvolunteercentral.com](http://www.churchvolunteercentral.com)) shared the results of a survey done by “Independent Sector”. The top reasons (listed in order) teens give for volunteering are:

- Feel compassion for the needy
- Cause is important to them
- Get new perspective on life
- If you help others, others help you
- It’s important to people they respect
- Looks good on a resume

What would the teens in your ministry say? Would they agree with these reasons? Are all of the reasons God-pleasing? What seems to be missing? Where does living a life of worship to God and gospel motivation fit in? Talk about it with them.



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## Youth Opinion Matters

Last December, via a broadcast e-mail to all WELS pastors and area Lutheran high schools, the WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship (CYD) invited your congregation's teens to take a short online survey. If your teens have been extended this invitation already, THANKS so much! If they have not, would you consider passing this information on to them as soon as possible?

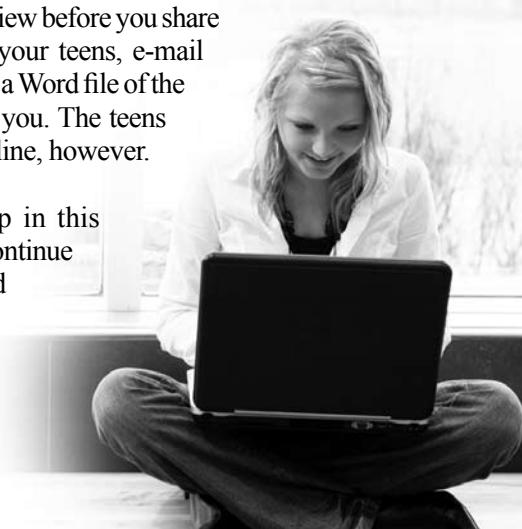
The survey includes some questions that are biographical/topical and others that are more connected to the findings from the recent CYD national study on why youth leave WELS. (You can find this study at [www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship](http://www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship). The link is on the right.) Your teens' responses will help 1) provide much needed data on what WELS teens think and feel, 2) help WELS teens to know that their opinions matter, 3) give CYD another read on the national study results, 4) provide CYD with information that can assist future resource development,

and 5) provide topics for group discussion at this summer's International Youth Rally in Dallas, TX.

Your teens can go to the youth rally Web site ([www.welsyouthrally.net](http://www.welsyouthrally.net)) and click on the survey link there. Please DO NOT go online and take the survey yourself, as that will skew the results from the teens. If you want a hard copy of the survey questions to review before you share the information with your teens, e-mail [cyd@sab.wels.net](mailto:cyd@sab.wels.net) and a Word file of the survey will be sent to you. The teens must do the survey online, however.

Thanks for your help in this endeavor. May God continue to bless your teens and your congregation's ministry to them!

**If you have any questions about the survey, call 414-256-3224 or e-mail the CYD Administrator, Dr. Joel Nelson ([joel.nelson@sab.wels.net](mailto:joel.nelson@sab.wels.net)).**



**Please contact us with any questions or for further information.**

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