



REACH!

Produced by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Commission on Youth Discipleship

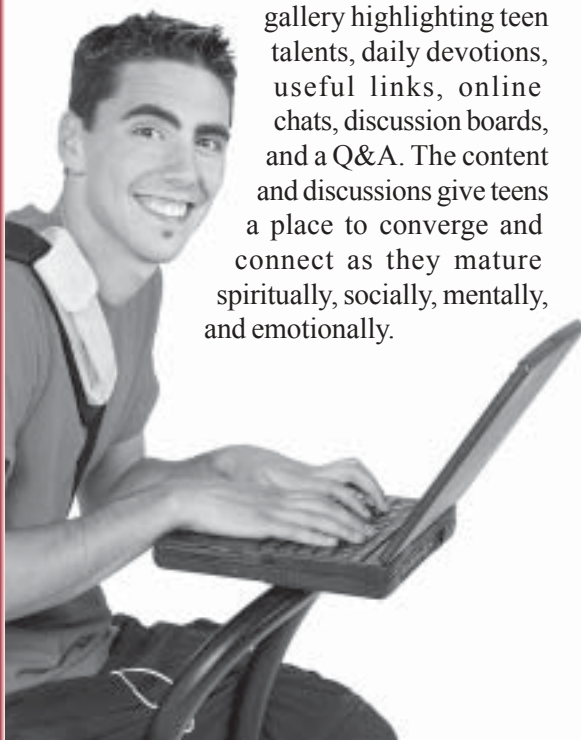
Exercising the “Great Commission” Through the World Wide Web

by Jeremy Bakken, Administrative Assistant – WELS Youth Discipleship

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew 28:19-20

About 5 years ago, WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship (CYD) launched the Web site *LivingBold* (www.livingbold.net), a Web site designed to offer teens spiritual encouragement and promote Christian interaction, sharing, and discussion. Content includes a variety of real-life stories with spiritual application for teens, a gallery highlighting teen talents, daily devotions, useful links, online chats, discussion boards, and a Q&A. The content and discussions give teens a place to converge and connect as they mature spiritually, socially, mentally, and emotionally.



Recently, a review of the site by a focus group of WELS teens led to the conclusion that a re-tooling of the purpose and presentation of the Web site may be in order to appeal to its target audience. While the primary purpose of *LivingBold* was to give WELS teens a place to converge online, this Web site could become a more effective tool for witnessing to non-WELS teens and partnering with WELS teens in witnessing to others.

For teens, direct conversation about Jesus and faith can be difficult because of their under-developed self-confidence and the necessity for peer approval. Recognizing that, a reworking of the *LivingBold* site to more suit a pop-culture audience, could make it easier for WELS teens to more confidently say to others, “Hey, go check out this cool Web site.”

In addition, the average Internet user does not stumble upon a stand-alone Web site unless specifically looking for it. With this in mind, the suggestion was made that the

IN THIS ISSUE

What Makes a Difference to Teens?....	2
Survey Says.....	3
Can You Help Us?.....	3
New Man Joins CYD Ministry.....	3
CYD Notes.....	4
Contemplating Youth Ministry.....	5

And More!

Comments about this

REACH!

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

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Continued on page 2

LivingBold Web site could be brought to a larger teen audience if presented in a format teens like more. The latest such place seems to be the *MySpace* environment (www.myspace.com). Here, user can connect to user and group to group, using networking through invitation to fuel traffic to your own personal profile.

Because it makes sense and to demonstrate that we were listening to the teen feedback given, CYD has created a *MySpace* profile (www.myspace.com/livingbold), which will tap into this networking environment. The links on the page all lead to the more content-heavy *LivingBold* Web site. It is our prayer that the wider world will become familiar with Christ and WELS by utilizing these tools and the communication opportunities they afford.

In the near future, the *LivingBold* Web site will undergo a facelift. Content will continue to be updated and relevant, and new ideas will continue to be developed and implemented. Check out both sites, and spread the word to the teens you know! God-willing, these two Web sites will continue to strengthen WELS teens and enable them and us to fulfill the Great Commission.

The logo for LivingBold.net features the word "living" in a white, lowercase, serif font with a subtle shadow effect, positioned above the word "bold" which is rendered in a larger, bold, lowercase, sans-serif font. The background is dark with some circular patterns.

www.livingbold.net

What Makes a Difference to Teens?

*Ideas adapted from Choosing Church by Carol E. Lytch
(see review on pages 5-6)*

Congregations which offer the following three things seem to attract teens and retain their participation. How does your congregation stack up to these?

A Sense of Belonging

Churches are social institutions, and one of the key reasons people in general and youth in particular are attracted to them is for the social relationships they offer. Social relationships, especially peer group relationships, are important to teens. Churches that work to enhance and deepen these relationships attract teens and move them to stick around.

A Sense of Meaning

Churches offer people, including teens, a way to make sense out of their comprehensive experience. Unlike other institutions in a teen's life (school, sports, job, etc. that represent one segment of experience), churches strive to make sense of the whole of life, pointing to a foundation of being (God, Bible) upon which all other understandings are built. When churches seriously address teens' questions of meaning and purpose from a biblical perspective, teens are attracted to them and stick around.

A Challenge to Competence

Churches that offer teens a challenge to develop competence, achieve high goals and standards of excellence, make demands of them that are worthy of their attention and energy, and offer rites of passage that mark important steps to adulthood, attract teens and move them to stick around.



Thinking Ahead

Partly in anticipation that some WELS congregations will not make it into the 2007 WELS International Youth Rally in Dallas, and partly because they want to do something different, a group from St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Muskego, WI, under the direction of Staff Minister Dan Thiel and youth leader Brian Arthur Lampe, is planning a youth rally at Three Bears Lodge in Warrens, WI. The dates: July 25-28. The theme: "Mission Possible: Don't Be Afraid, Just Believe." Approximate cost: \$250.00/person.

For more information e-mail Dan: dthiel@stpaulmuskego.org or Brian: brianandtracey@tds.net.

Survey Says...

Research done by The Gallup Organization (Princeton, NJ) in 2001 revealed 12 factors that help congregation members stay actively engaged in their churches. The factors are noted below as if they were spoken by the member him/herself. Would the teens in your congregation say these statements? If not, what can you do to change that?

- ✓ As a member of my congregation, I know what is expected of me.
- ✓ In my congregation, my spiritual needs are met.
- ✓ In my congregation, I regularly have the opportunity to do what I do best.
- ✓ In the last month, I have received recognition or praise from someone in my congregation.
- ✓ The spiritual leaders in my congregation seem to care about me as a person.
- ✓ There is someone in my congregation who encourages my spiritual development.
- ✓ As a member of my congregation, my opinions seem to count.
- ✓ The mission or purpose of my congregation makes me feel my participation is important.
- ✓ The other members of my congregation are committed to spiritual growth.
- ✓ Aside from family members, I have a best friend in my congregation.
- ✓ In the last six months, someone in my congregation has talked to me about the progress of my spiritual growth.
- ✓ In my congregation, I have opportunities to learn and grow.

Can You Help Us?

REACH! comes to WELS youth ministers in one of two ways: either in direct mailing to individual homes, or in bulk to a congregation where the individual copies are then distributed. Currently, 4,826 *REACH!* are direct mailed each quarter and 600 are bulk mailed, totalling 5,426 issues. Printing and postage costs are quite high for this, as you can imagine, so we'd like to keep the database as free of duplication as possible. Please help us with this.

If you are receiving:

- a direct mail copy and one passed out via your congregation
- a direct mail copy, but really no longer care to
- multiple, direct mail copies
- more bulk copies than you have youth ministry staff members or need for distributing to others like Board of Education members, etc.
- or some other scenario leaving you with more copies than you need,

then e-mail your updated information/numbers/wishes to Karen Kulow (daskk@charter.net). She will make the database corrections.

If, however, your congregation needs to receive additional bulk mail copies to distribute or needs to add new youth ministry staff members to the direct mailing database, then let Karen know that, too. THANKS!

We'd love to have more people reading *REACH!*. We also want to make sure we are being good stewards of the precious resources we have. If we don't hear from you, we'll leave things the way they currently are in the database. If there are changes, get them to us ASAP, and thanks so much for the help.



New Man Joins CYD Ministry

The Commission on Youth Discipleship welcomes a new member to the Administrative Assistant position, which was vacant for several months after the resignation of Bob Mateske last July. Jeremy Bakken, a 2004 Wisconsin Lutheran College graduate, joined the CYD team in October, 2006. He graduated Magna Cum Laude with a double major in Mathematics and Music Composition. Prior to joining CYD, Jeremy was store manager at the Wauwatosa location of Beihoff Music, a Wisconsin-based music company. While there, he assisted in multiple areas such as Internet development and Web design, marketing, customer service, and administrative duties. This

background has prepared him well to assume the duties and responsibilities that are his as part of the CYD team. You can contact Jeremy at 414-256-3274 or jeremy.bakken@sab.wels.net. You can learn more about Jeremy at www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship. Click on "About Youth Discipleship."



Check Out www.youthpastor.com

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

I stumbled upon www.youthpastor.com while looking for other youth ministry information and found it to be full of potentially helpful items. The “games” area alone had 338 games listed and described. Another unique item was a page where you could find 9,430 different names to call your teen group. Discussion starters based on stories in the news seemed interesting, as well as a 30 category archive of lesson ideas. And there was a lot more.

PLEASE NOTE: This is not a WELS Web site (I could not really tell who was sponsoring it) and I did not review everything. Be discerning and ask your pastor when in doubt – unless he is you!!! You may find some helpful items to make your youth ministry better. Below is a short blurb from the “About YP” page:

YouthPastor.Com was founded in 1997 to create the most comprehensive youth ministry network and online “free” resource for youth pastors. Our focus is dedicated to the youth pastor, designing resources and services that are not typically available from the church denominations and Christian curriculum publishing services. Instead, our services complement the offerings of specialized ministries and curriculum publishers.

Another Web site to explore is www.pastor2youth.com. Again, this is not a WELS site, so be discerning. You may find some very safe and useable ideas and items that are FREE. Here’s a blurb from this Web site:

Welcome to the home of one of the largest youth ministry freebie archives on the internet. My name is Ryan Nielsen and I am the founder of Pastor2youth.com. I currently work full time as a junior high youth pastor in Southern California and have been in youth ministry since 1991. I started the site because I wanted to provide youth workers with an online network to be able to exchange ideas, stories, resources and more online. . .but to make all of this available completely FREE!

WELS Lending Library

The Southeastern Wisconsin District Committee on Youth Discipleship has established a lending library through Wisconsin Lutheran College in Milwaukee. As of fall, 2006, the library contains 44 resources covering a variety of ministry areas such as teen, parenting, Sunday school, VBS, and youth Bible studies. More titles will be added in the future. Called and lay servants from congregations and ministries in the Southeastern Wisconsin District have permission to check out the resources. We sincerely thank Wisconsin Lutheran College for housing the library and providing borrow-and-return services. For details about viewing and borrowing procedures, check out the CYD Web site: www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship. Look in the “National, District, and Local Training” collection and then in the “WELS District Lending Libraries” folder.

Laugh Out Loud: The Excitement Builds!

As has been announced before, the 2007 WELS International Youth Rally will take place in Dallas, TX at the Hyatt Regency Hotel. 3,500 participants are being planned for. The Rally Planning Committee is finalizing all the program details, and you can go to www.welsyouthrally.net to see the information as we currently have it. Check back often for updates.

Perhaps the biggest change for the 2007 rally will be the registration process. All of it will be done online. In mid-late November, your congregation will receive the preliminary registration information in the mail. Then in January, the online registration process will begin with youth contact leaders registering their groups first from January 2-14 and then individual youth and additional leaders registering from January 16-31. Moving registration online should make the entire process easier for you and for the CYD and Youth Rally staff.

If you have any questions either now, or after you receive your registration information in November, please contact Jeremy Bakken:

Phone: 414-256-3274
E-mail: jeremy.bakken@sab.wels.net

Did You Miss It?

If you could not make it to the WELS National Youth Ministry Conference last September 15-17 in Scottsdale, AZ, you can look at some of the presentation materials at:

www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship

Click the link at the bottom of the page.

Contemplating Youth Ministry

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

Recently, 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 figures, beginning in the year 2006, the total population of teens will be the greatest in American history (Reid 2004, 35). The time is ripe for us 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 (www.nph.net, product# 38-3143). At the right is a review of another general-interest resource dealing with young adult education and nurture. One must be wary of the, sometimes glaring, theological weaknesses in non-WELS products, but they can be potentially useful in striking up conversations in our own midst about essential elements of youth ministry.

Choosing Church: What Makes a Difference for Teens?

Lytch, Carol E.

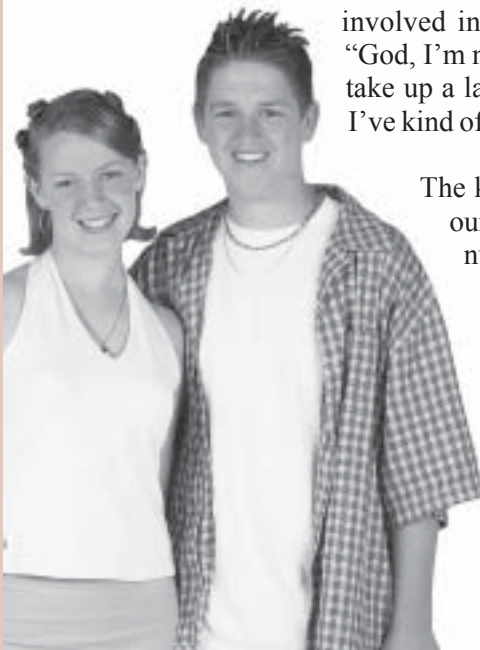
Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004 / 294 pages / \$24.95

Choosing Church is a result of Ph.D. research by an adjunct professor at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. It consists of approximately 200 pages of text and 100 pages’ worth of appendices. Lytch’s liberal view of church affairs is quite evident. She uses fellow Presbyterian C. Ellis Nelson’s fuzzy definition of faith: “Faith is the ‘residue’ of religious experience, the enduring conviction remaining when the intense moment of theophany fades.” She is uncritical of doctrine and practice in the churches she studied, accepting Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant, and an evangelical megachurch each as valid and successful in its own way. Christ receives prominent mention on these pages only when students speak of him in interviews; rarely does the author herself point to the centrality of the Christ. This is admittedly “a fine-grained sociological analysis,” not a sound theological treatise.

The book bears reading, however, for the insight it offers into American religious culture—particularly as it pertains to teenagers. Lytch’s research method was qualitative; she selected three distinctive congregations and did extensive interviews with parents, teens and staff involved in those “successful” youth ministries. She wanted to determine what factors influenced teens’ loyalty to the religious denominations in which they were raised, seeking to “understand why and in what ways teens decide to embrace the tradition handed down by their religious community.” The portrayals of family situations and youth perspectives are thought-provoking, such as the story of Brittany who “was left stranded after she was confirmed in the church” or that of Megan who, while heavily involved in her church’s activities, yet says, “God, I’m not really religious. It doesn’t really take up a large part of my life. It’s something I’ve kind of grown up with and gotten used to.”

The key findings of Lytch’s study draw our attention as we think about youth nurture in our churches.

- Her research vividly evidences how choice and personal autonomy have become dominant in our culture. She concludes, “Teens today—like many adults—tend to conceive of religion in a highly personal way that is less tethered to an



Continued on back page

REACH!

“Contemplating Youth Ministry” . . . continued from page 5

- unquestioned religious authority. They might embrace a historic religious tradition, but they also might pick and choose the beliefs and practices within it that make sense to them.”
- Her study gives special attention to high school seniors. “It is as if seniors come to a fork in the road where they are presented with the prospect of either dropping out of church or becoming more committed to their community of faith.” We would do well to see the senior year of high school—and freshman year of college—as a pivotal point in the lives of our young people. Parents easily get wrapped up in what Lytch calls “resumé-building,” making sure kids get all their college programs set up, but leaving them on their own to pursue spiritual nurture. Her interviews attest to the fact that parents still can have significant spiritual influence as teenagers are independent adults.
- According to Lytch, “the most significant of all factors contributing to teen religious loyalty” is “regular family church attendance.” That should come as no surprise. It’s

like pursuing detailed scientific research to find out that broccoli is healthier than candy. Nevertheless, emphasis on the urgency of parental involvement cannot be stated too strongly or too often. Worth our reading in this regard, Lytch testifies to the consequence of cultivating “a warm climate in the family.” She addresses various parenting styles and the impact that these can have on the development of spiritual life in children and youth.

Choosing Church is an attempt to ascertain how to reach and keep teens amid a changing, post-traditional society. Intriguing for its observations on societal patterns and attitudes, it is devoid of any recognition of the Gospel’s efficacy. The research here has a form of godliness but misses all its real power. Ultimately, our task in the Spirit is to keep youth connected to Christ through Word and Sacrament, not merely to help them “choose to stay connected to their religious tradition.”

In the next *REACH!* issue Prof. Sellnow will review Alvin L. Reid’s *Raising the Bar: Ministry to Youth in the New Millennium*

Please contact us with any questions or for further information.