



REACH!

Produced by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Commission on Youth Discipleship

Cultivating a Youth Ministry That Matters: Part II

by Dr. Joel Nelson, Administrator – WELS Youth Discipleship

Last issue, we began this series of articles on cultivating solid youth ministries. Cultivating is a good metaphor because through our ministries to pre-teens and teens, and our emphasis on the Means of Grace, we are preparing youth to grow. We are using tools that keep the weeds of Satan and the world away from them. We are, by the power of the Holy Spirit, refining, improving, encouraging, and nurturing the dear youth God puts before us. Using the cultivating theme, we also said that good youth ministries 1) plant early, 2) dig in with parents, 3) fertilize friendships, 4) rototill resources, and 5) get down and dirty with those served. In Part 1, “Planting Early” was covered. This time we focus on “Digging in With Parents.”

Dig In With Parents

Do you suspect that parents make a difference? If you do, you are not alone! Take a look at what others have said:

“Although peers sometimes do exercise more control over an adolescent’s choice of dress, music, entertainment, etc., only when parents are extremely negligent do peers exercise more control over the teen’s choice of beliefs and relational styles than the parents do. In the vast majority of cases, parents remain the single most important influence in the development of an adolescent’s personality”
Peter Benson, Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations (1990).

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AND MUCH MORE!

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

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“Because of the extensive exposure parents have to their own children, they leave an indelible impression that radically affects how receptive their children will be to the gospel. There is overwhelming evidence that parents are, almost always, the single most significant determining factor in the development of their children” *Mark DeVries, Family Based Youth Ministry* (1994).

“Traditional youth ministers work themselves to the bone to hold their ministries together. . . while at the same time ignoring the most powerful resource they have—teenagers’ parents. Youth ministers and churches can no longer continue to view parents as neutral factors in their ministry to [youth]” *Mark DeVries, Family Based Youth Ministry* (1994).

“Parents, simply by the way they raise their children, will either empower our ministries or sabotage them. Parents play a role second only to that of the Holy Spirit in building the spiritual foundation of their children” *Mark DeVries, Family Based Youth Ministry* (1994).

“In all the studies we’ve accumulated over the years regarding what influences teens, parents continue to be the most influential shapers of a person’s life—either positively or negatively, I’m not sure we’ve responded in our structure and programming to embrace that concept” *Ben Freudenburg, The Family Friendly Church* (1998).

“[In recent studies] parents were listed by most teens as having a lot of influence on how they think and act. More than three out of four teenagers (78%) acknowledged that their parents have a lot of impact on their thoughts and deeds. No other group came close to having that degree of perceived influence” *George Barna, Real Teens* (2004).

That parents are so important is also reinforced by what’s called “social learning theory.” Social learning theory says that behaviors of valued individuals are modeled and that adolescents are more likely to model the behavior of each parent if they have a good relationship with that parent. Social learning theory also holds that a significant model in one’s life can instill self-beliefs that will influence the course and direction that life will take.

Proverbs 1:3-9 adds this awesome picture, “. . . for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair. . . let the wise listen. . . Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. They

will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.”

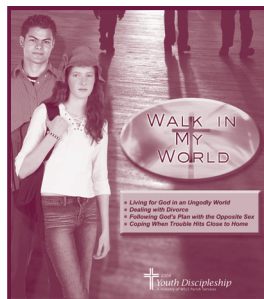
The case for parents’ influence and involvement is pretty compelling. Parental involvement is good for youth and it’s good for parents. The notion that youth really don’t want their parents around and that parents really don’t want to be around is faulty. Ample evidence can be found to demonstrate that youth desire and appreciate their parents’ active involvement, and that parents really do want to be engaged with their pre-teen and teen children in mutually meaningful ways.

Cultivating a youth ministry that matters involves digging in with parents, and this “digging in” should happen on several levels:

1 Educate parents (and youth) in an intentional and thoughtful way, on how influential and needed parents are. Maybe offer sessions for parents about living with teens, sessions for teens about living with parents, and sessions for both together where mutual exchange, education, encouragement, and Bible study can happen.

2 After the education, work with parents and youth to create win-win ways for both to connect – in their homes and via church sponsored activities with other parents and teens. Start small and see where it goes. Be patient. Also be ready for some resistance. No “self-respecting” teen is going to publicly admit that they want to hang around with their parents even though they do want their parents’ involvement. And some parents feel so inferior with regard to their parenting that they may not want to be publicly “outed”. Be sensitive. Most of all, be strong. Expect involvement from parents and teens and don’t let any of them off the hook so easily.

Cultivating a youth ministry that matters is hard work. But like gardening, the “fruits” of your effort can be enjoyed by everyone!



Get Parents and Teens Together Around the Word

Walk In My World is a great resource for getting parents and teens together to talk about vital real-life topics. Learn more about this

resource at <www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship> and watch for *Walk In My World 2*, coming this winter.



ROCK

An Innovative Collaboration

by Hans Metzger, Staff Minister
Good Shepherd's Lutheran Church – West Allis, WI

ROCK – Real Opportunities for Christian Kids started four years ago as the brainstorm of Pastor Nathan Strobel, Campus Pastor at Wisconsin Lutheran College (WLC), Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Today, with the combined cooperation of four congregations (Good Shepherd's-West Allis, Jordan-West Allis, Woodlawn-West Allis, and Star of Bethlehem-New Berlin) ROCK is a flourishing Youth group of great activities, growth in God's Word, and Christian fellowship.

ROCK depends on the work of the leaders of the four congregations, including Pastor Ben Wessel of Woodlawn, Kim Gajewski of Jordan, Hans Metzger of Good Shepherd's, and Pastor Jon Nitz of Star of Bethlehem and four Student Directors from WLC. Early planning of the group caused the founders to focus activities and get-togethers at the REX (Recreation/Education Complex) on the campus of WLC. Now, four years later, the group continues to use WLC's wonderful facilities as well as the youth leaders who come from the WLC student body.

Each WLC leader is sponsored by participating congregations with a \$500 scholarship per year. The WLC directors respond with activity planning, Bible study planning and presentation, as well as keeping in contact with the Youth of ROCK. The WLC leaders for 2004-2005 are Katie Behm, Ross Finnigan, Karis Huebner, and Kendall Cortright. The WLC and congregation leaders schedule at least one activity a month at WLC (each activity begins with a Bible study), two Bible Studies at one of the congregations each year, three nights of "dodgeball," and singing engagements at the participating congregations' services.

Activities have included caroling in the "Candy Cane Lane" area in December, a January LOCK-IN, a Christian concert in February, and ultimate Frisbee in the WLC REX. Past

years have seen the ROCK do "paintball" and last year the group sponsored a Travel Canvass Trip to East Fork, Arizona to help paint the East Fork Lutheran School building.

ROCK has been involved in other various service projects throughout its existence. This year a group will be attending the WELS International Youth Rally in Florida. ROCK is also planning a carnival for kids in an area hospital. The WLC students have become an integral part of the program, showing tremendous leadership skills and love for the young people as well as putting to use their own personal skills in music, athletics, organization and other numerous areas.

“...God has truly blessed the efforts of ROCK. While only God can quantify the effects of the hearts and minds of the teens, success is evident in the attendance and activity numbers.”

Kim Gajewski says, "As one of the Real Opportunities for Christian Kids directors, I can see that God has truly blessed the efforts of ROCK. While only God can quantify the effects on the hearts and minds of the teens, success is evident in the attendance and activity numbers. ROCK's first year as a joint effort between Jordan and Good Shepherd's saw an average of thirteen teens attend each of the six activities. We eagerly welcomed Star of Bethlehem and Woodlawn churches the following year and immediately saw our numbers double. ROCK has 175 active teens of which 71 have attended ac-

activities this year. (As many as 60 students have attended an activity at one time). This equals a participation rate of over 40% with each teen attending an average of nearly 2.5 meetings. ROCK has an additional four to five planned before finishing our year."

While ROCK has mainly been aimed at 8th grade through 10th grade, some of the 10th graders have continued to attend right on into their junior and senior years of high school. Their

(Continued on page 4 . . .)

On-Line Youth Ministry

Excerpts from Barefoot Ministries 2003

In a recent study, Len Keagler, professor of youth ministry at Nyack College, noted a correlation between healthy, growing youth ministries (led by a full-time youth minister) and a dedicated youth group web site. Now, correlations don't prove anything about cause and effect. They only indicate relationships. Starting a web site doesn't guarantee one is going to have a growing youth group, and not all growing youth groups have web sites. Yet, there seems to be some relationship between healthy youth ministries and integration of the Internet with those ministries. Len says,

"When I think about the possibilities of youth ministry Internet sites that allow local youth groups to communicate directly and indirectly with their own constituents and thousands of 'religious surfers,' I can get excited. When I think about quiet kids who would never enter into the 'lion's den' of a physical in-person discussion about spiritual issues testing their ideas in a monitored youth ministry chat room, I can get excited. When I think about the possibility to

providing all the mundane, but essential, information about youth ministry activities (e.g., time, money, medical release/permission forms) in a 24/7 accessible location so that youth leaders can spend more time talking with people about meaning and purpose, I can get excited. When I think about the possibilities of providing current on-line devotional resources customized to local youth ministries, I can get excited. When I think about youth communicating daily with each other about spiritual things and exploring what it means for them to be Christian rather than waiting for our compacted 'small-group discussions' during our meager minutes together on Sunday and Wednesday, I can get excited."

Maybe it is time for youth ministry to take a more proactive stance toward utilizing the Internet for more than a 'stick-pin' bulletin board of outdated information. Then again, if you're reading this, you probably don't need to be convinced. We just need to spread the word . . . on-line."

("ROCK" . . . Continued from page 3)

leadership, example, and mature faith have helped to encourage more young people to take part in the wide variety of ROCK activities. Funding for the group comes from yearly congregational support.

"We have seen substantial growth and enthusiasm each year," says Hans Metzger, "and now we look ahead to expanding. Down the road we see ROCK expanding substantially."

ROCK continues to grow and encourage young people in the love and joy of Jesus Christ. To God be the glory!

What the Kids are saying about ROCK...

"...great atmosphere where you don't have to be ashamed of your faith and you can have a lot of fun..."

Jesse – Junior, Wisconsin Lutheran High School

"...ROCK not only gives me the opportunity to have fun and reflect on God's Word with young teens, but it also has strengthened my faith and ability to be a great Christian example through words and actions."

*Katie Behm,
WLC Student Director*

You can contact Hans Metzger to learn more about ROCK:
hmetzger26@hotmail.com

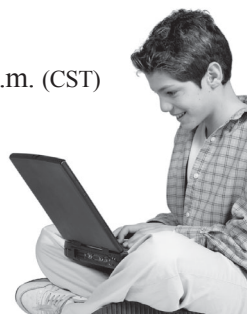
Living

LivingBold:
Live Chats

In May, June, July, and August, *LivingBold* will host open live chats. Join in and chat with teens from all over the world.

- 🔔 **What's up for summer?:** Sunday, May 22, 8:30-9:30 p.m. (CST)
- 🔔 **Youth leaders share ideas/issues:** Sunday, June 19, 8:30-9:30 p.m. (CST)
- 🔔 **Youth Rally recap:** Sunday, July 17, 8:30-9:30 p.m. (CST)
- 🔔 **School stinks but I gotta go:** Sunday, August 21, 8:30-9:30 p.m. (CST)

Simply go to www.livingbold.net and enter the chats when they take place.



News & Notes

Christ-Light® Teen/High School Curriculum Is Now Complete!

(41 sets) in all! NEW lessons suggested for Grade 12.
Three topical sets of lessons - One set of lessons on 1 Peter

- ◆ Designed for use in high school curriculum and in weekly teen Bible classes
- ◆ Taught as an entire curriculum or separate elements added to an established curriculum
- ◆ Flexible copy master format with student lesson copy masters, teacher's guide, and a CD with RTF and PDF files
- ◆ Core books at each level for congregational teen Bible history lessons; topicals as well
- ◆ For sample email Mark Buske: buskem@nph.wels.net

To learn more specifics on the lessons visit
<http://www.nph.net/cgi-bin/site.pl?ChristLightMenu>
(and click on the appropriate grade level)

Think About This . . .

How could your teen group partner with other WELS/ELS teen groups in your area to create a win-win ministry that connects more young people to Jesus and each other?

If you are close to a WELS Campus Ministry, how could your teen ministry take advantage of the spiritual college students in the Campus Ministry and perhaps also help them via a stipend, care package, hug?

You can learn more about WELS Campus Ministries at <www.wels.net/cm>. You could create your own ROCK group.

Check These WELS Youth Group Sites!

WILDFIRE

<http://my.execpc.com/~noel/sjyouth.html>

The ROC

<http://www.thewttnroc.com/>

If your group has a dedicated website, give us the address.

Soundbite

LIVINGBOLD

Thanks for being sooo awesome! This ministry does NOT go un-noticed! I love this website and I love how it relates and connects teens to the Word of God. That is such an important thing these days! I just want to encourage you by telling you that I've been a camp counselor at various camps, and I love being able to tell the kids and teens about this website and I've always been given positive feedback about it. The teens love the e-devotions and I do as well. They help me on my daily walk and are so inspiring! Thank you for letting God lead you all into this ministry. You are doing an excellent job.

~ Stephanie's online evaluation

Learn Jesus' Model for Counseling

By Dr. John Juern, Christian Family Counseling-Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service

Jesus comes to hurting people. (Luke 24:13-24)

- ◆ He listens. (James 1:19, Proverbs 18:13)
- ◆ He asks questions. (Proverbs 20:5)

Jesus counsels or instructs the people. (Luke 24:25-27)

- ◆ He uses words carefully and lovingly. (Galatians 6:1-2, Proverbs 16:23-24, Proverbs 12:18)
- ◆ The counsel is based on God's Word. (Colossians 3:16, 2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Timothy 4:2)
- ◆ He gives needed help. (Matthew 11:28, Jeremiah 31:3)

Jesus has compassion for hurting people. (Luke 24:28-35)

- ◆ He felt their feelings. (Mark 6:34, Romans 12:15)
- ◆ He gave thanks. (Ephesians 5:19-20, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)



We Need Your Support

As you know, **REACH!** comes to you free of charge. In order to maintain this level of service and continue this ministry effort, we could use your help. Please consider a financial gift to WELS-CYD and the **REACH!** newsletter.

REACH!

Survey Says...

A recent Pew Foundation research project exploring the integration of the Internet and American life <www.pewinternet.org> found out the following:

- 30% of Internet users participate in religious/spiritual information searches, more than on-line banking, auctions sites, or online dating.
- For 17 million teenagers, use of the Internet plays a major role in their relationships with their friends, their families, and their schools.
- 26% of teens on the Internet say it helps them get information about things that are hard to talk to other people about.
- 69% of religious Internet surfers say the valued Internet activity is informal conversation with friends and peers.
- 82% of on-line teens use the Internet to make plans with their friends.
- Some teens feel the Internet frees them more fully to be their true selves.
- For some teens, the possibility of exploring who they are, who they might become, and how they present themselves to the world...is the primary use of the Internet.
- Religious surfers' use of the Internet does not lead them to join a new faith-based organization or group, as much as help them connect with the organizations to which they already belong.



Please contact us with any questions or for further information.

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