



REACH!

Produced by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Commission on Youth Discipleship

Cultivating a Youth Ministry That Matters

by Joel Nelson, Administrator – WELS Youth Discipleship

According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* “cultivate” means to, 1) prepare for growing, 2) to loosen the soil and kill weeds, 3) to grow, 4) to refine, improve, encourage, or nurture.

All of these definitions have application to what we are trying to do in our ministries to youth, teens, and their parents. 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.

With this article, *REACH!* begins a five part series on “Cultivating a Youth Ministry That Matters.” In this series we shall see how a youth ministry that really matters does the following things:

- ◆ **Plants Early**
- ◆ **Digs in With Parents**
- ◆ **Fertilizes Friendships**
- ◆ **Rototills Resources**
- ◆ **Gets Down and Dirty with Those Served**



(Continued on page 2)

IN THIS ISSUE

Why REACH!?!.....3

Love Can Build a Bridge.....3

Another Satisfied Customer.....4

Reasons Teens Give for Not Attending Church.....5

Living Bold: A Virtual Youth Group.....5

Over 3,000 to Attend 2005 Rally!.....6

AND MUCH MORE!

Comments about this **REACH!**

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

Joel Nelson, Administrator
WELS CYD
(414) 256-3274
FAX (414) 256-3899
e-mail: cyd@sab.wels.net

REACH!

It could just be, of course that I was in the right mood. But I thought you really hit your stride with the Winter 2005 issue of *REACH!* It seemed optimistic and accurate (rather than triumphal), helpful, laid out well, and interesting. I hope you get other compliments about it. *Pastor Paul Prange, President-Michigan Lutheran Seminary-Saginaw, MI*

("Cultivating..." continued from page 1)

Cool cultivating metaphors, don't you think? In this first article we take a look at planting early.

Plant Early

A youth ministry that matters understands that the potential to impact teens and their parents in meaningful, spiritual ways is directly proportional to the impact had on them when they were much, much younger. Research is pretty clear that "planting early" makes a big difference:

"Experiences that fill [a child's] first days, months, and years have a decisive impact on the structure of a child's brain and, in turn, on every aspect of a child's life throughout adulthood." *Ten Tips for Raising Happier, Healthier Children* (2002)

"Childhood experiences act as the primary architects of the brain's capabilities for a lifetime. Consistent, nurturing, structured, and enriched experiences lead to a flexible, empathetic, and intelligent adult." *Great Beginnings: The First Years Last Forever* (1998)

The Jesuits are credited with saying, "Give me your child until he's six and you can have him the rest of his life." They understood that "The Formative Years" are just that: the formative years. So much of what a person thinks, feels, believes, and does is molded in childhood. Jason Nelson, former WELS *Forward with Lutheran Schools* Director and Administrator for WELS Parish Schools put it this way:

Jesus' and our emphasis on children is not sentimentalism. It is serious business because of the power and brevity of the moment of childhood. We all understand what is at stake in the first few years of the life of any person. Every positive inclination toward personality, intellect, even faith itself is formed in childhood. George Barna's research has revealed that regardless of culture, economics, or any other factor – apart from the Means of Grace – the chances of a person coming to faith in Jesus go down dramatically after childhood. On the other hand every sinful dysfunction, character flaw, and destructive tendency in any person's life are also formed in childhood – in the very womb itself. What we learn in childhood is so critical that the good of it sustains us throughout life and the bad of it takes a lifetime to try to overcome. The teachable moments of childhood are so significant that the wisest man ever in the world [Solomon] encouraged, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." *Children in the Church-2003*

George Barna also wrote in his 2003 book, *Transforming Your Children into Spiritual Champions*:

"[A] person's moral foundations are generally in place by the time they reach age nine. While those foundations are refined and the application of those foundations may shift to some extent as the individual ages, their fundamental perspectives on truth, integrity, meaning, justice, morality, and ethics are formed quite early in life. After their first decade, most people simply refine their views as they age without a wholesale change in those leanings. Data [indicates] that in most cases people's spiritual beliefs are irrevocably formed when they are pre-teens. Upon comparing data from a national survey of 13-year-olds with an identical survey among adults, [it was] found that the belief profile related to a dozen central spiritual principles was identical between the two groups. In essence, what you believe by the time you are 13 is what you will die believing."

"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 to children for an extended period of years prior to age 13. One implication is that the individuals who will become the church's leaders two decades from now are probably active in church programs today."

Bottom line: training children from the earliest ages possible is HUGE! And what's even more exciting is that parents, when their children are young and they, themselves, are young are a lot more willing to hear what the church and you have to say. Many a teen minister has left a disappointing counseling session with a teen and his/her parents lamenting, "It's almost too late to do anything now. If they'd only done what they needed to do much earlier."

Planting early, through baptism and the seed of God's Word, is so important if we want to "grow" – by the power of the Holy Spirit – a vibrant, fruit-bearing group of teens and parents. But you may be asking yourself, "I get that, but what about now? What about the youth ministry to teens and parents I'm engaged in now?" That's a legitimate question which will be covered in more detail in future *REACH!* articles. In the mean time, continue to cultivate – to "refine, improve, encourage, and nurture" these dear children of God in whatever ways you can. But also start developing ways that your congregation's ministry to youth can plant a lot earlier.

In Review: Why *REACH!*?

REACH! was first published in the fall of 2002. Currently 4,500 individuals engaged in ministry to teens and their parents subscribe. After 2½ years it's time to remind everyone why this quarterly newsletter is named as it is. Below is the article that appeared in the first *REACH!* issue.

The name for this quarterly publication came from Jesus' words to Thomas, recorded in John 20:27: "Then he [Jesus] said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.'"

It seems that many pre-teens, teens, and parents, are like Thomas sometimes. Through the Bible and worship, they have seen the Savior, heard him speak, had a relationship with him, yet still have doubts when the going gets tough. They need to be reminded that Jesus is real. His death on the cross was real. His resurrection was real. His preparation of heaven for us is real. His unconditional love for us is real. His desire to rule in our hearts is real. Through Word and Sacrament, WELS youth and their parents need to reach out and touch Jesus and have his loving, saving arms touch them back.

So many times, youth ministry is described as a way "to reach teens," a we-go-to-them kind of thing. Wouldn't it be better if youth ministry, through the power of the Holy Spirit, helps teens "to reach Jesus" and reach out to others, getting off themselves personally and stretching them to do more for Christ and others? May the pages of *REACH!* help all of us in some small way to do this very thing.

Love Can Build a Bridge: A Message for Parents

By Brian Arthur Lampe

When it comes to parenting who does everything right? This forum is prayerfully going to mend fences that separate the family from one another, and build bridges that connect Mom and Dad -teenager- and Christ together

We asked our St Paul's teens to tell us what they would suggest if they had an opportunity to encourage their parents to build a closer relationship with them. Here is a compilation of their responses.

Dear Mom and Dad,

Please have more patience with me. Remember, I'm still learning. We need to increase the level of communication between us. Please listen to everything I have to say before jumping to conclusions. It seems as though you don't understand me. When you're wrong, please admit it. Sometimes you're over-protective, and at times you act like you've never done anything wrong. Over exaggerating things, and bringing up mistakes I've made in the past makes me feel as though I'm not normal and cripples my self-esteem. You need to show me that you know what I'm going through. Don't just assume that my life is easier than yours. Pushing me into things I don't feel comfortable doing angers me. Please try to see me as the teenager that God created me to be. One more thing, when you lose your temper and yell at me, you push me further away from you and God. Why don't my opinions count? Why don't we have family Bible study at home? I thought we were a Christian family?

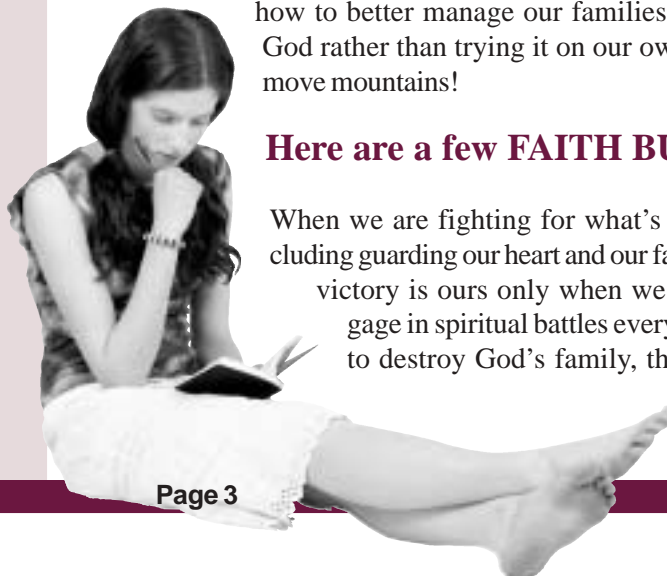
Sincerely your son or daughter.

Wow! You may be thinking: Why didn't they tell me these things? Unfortunately, Satan loves to shut down healthy communication between parents and their teens. What we have to recognize as parents is that sometimes we can be part of the problem. Perhaps we need to learn how to better manage our families through our faith in God rather than trying it on our own. With faith we can move mountains!

Here are a few FAITH BUILDERS:

When we are fighting for what's important to God-including guarding our heart and our family against the devil, victory is ours only when we rely on God. We engage in spiritual battles everyday. It is Satan's plan to destroy God's family, that's why we need to

*(Continued on
next page)*



turn to the Means of Grace to build strong, deeply rooted faith in the power of God.

Faith Builder #1: Rely on God's power with a relationship through Christ, prayer, and daily study of God's Word. Our identity is found in Christ. It is made visible when we put our faith in God when any temptation, trouble, or danger tries to come between us and our families.

Faith Builder #2: Rely on God's presence: Satan isn't afraid of us, however he is afraid of God. The moment we call on God the Evil One will flee. God is always present waiting for us to call on him, rather than trying to figure things out ourselves.

Faith Builder #3: Engage in Spiritual discipline; make time for daily family devotions, and encourage one another through God's Word. Worship and attend the Lord's Supper regularly.

Faith Builder #4: Set up healthy boundaries; they will develop godly relationships, respect others and avoid arguing when you have to say "no" to your teenager.

A healthy relationship between teenagers and their parents hinges on a fortified relationship with Christ! Parents, your relationship with your teenager is far from perfect. Think

back to when you were in high school. No matter what age your children are, or how distant your relationship is with your teenager, a closeness needs to be developed. They need to CLEARLY understand that they can talk to you about anything, anytime. As godly parent's, we must remain open-minded and not react with harsh words, or judgmental actions when our teenager makes a bad decision. If they can't count on us to listen to them without prejudice no matter how personal the problem,

THEY WILL GO ELSEWHERE! They will receive advice, and direction from a worldly perspective which is hostile to God's Word. Don't be afraid to shower them with God's love, and teach them about the fullness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

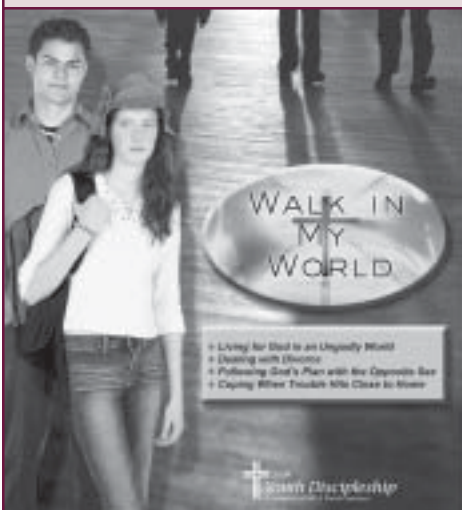
If parents and teenagers learn to communicate and compromise – where God's Word allows –

understanding will become clearer and there will be less aggression, frustration, and rebellion in God's family. May God continue to bless our families through a more intimate relationship with His Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Brian Arthur Lampe and his wife Tracey are leaders of God's Warriors at St Paul's Lutheran Church – Muskego, WI. You can email the Lampes about God's Warriors: <BrianandTracey@tds.net>



Another Satisfied Customer



I just wanted to thank you for your Bible study *Walk In My World*. I have used a number of Bible studies for my high school youth group from various sources. The non-WELS ones got to the nitty-gritty issues, but then used heavy law motivation to challenge the high schoolers to live for Christ. On the other hand, past WELS sources I used never really got to the meat of the issue: of how challenging it is to live for Christ in an ungodly world.

They would kind of say "Yep, it's bad out there, but God is here for you." They would skim the surface and not really apply to the students lives. Thank you for putting together a Bible study that reaches them where they are at, with the problems they endure, and yet still preaches solid Gospel motivation.

In Christ,
Pastor Steve Bauer St. Peter Lutheran Church – Ft. Collins, CO
steve.bauer@stpeterwels.com

Walk In My World can be purchased from <www.nph.net>. Order: #38-3089.
\$39.95 for video, CD, and binder with Leader's Guide and reproducible participant lessons.

Want to Join the Planning Committee?

Check out the *Wanna See?* <www.welsyouthrally.net> or *LivingBold* <www.livingbold.net> web sites to see the criterion for becoming a teen member of the WELS International Youth Rally Planning Committee. At *Wanna See?* look in the “Youth Rally Planning Committee” collection. At *LivingBold* look in the “Links Lot” in the “WELS Youth Rallies” folder.

Research Project Getting Started

In compliance with a 2003 WELS Convention resolution, CYD has budgeted funds and will engage an outside research consultant to study why teens and young adults are leaving WELS. A CYD subcommittee is working with a Milwaukee area research consultant, Bret Goodman, to develop the best process for obtaining this data. Initial thinking is to identify a statistically meaningful sample of WELS teens and young adults who have left their WELS congregations and solicit them to be interviewed by telephone. Those who are willing would complete a short telephone interview by the Goodman group. Potential online surveying and small focus group methods are also being considered. More details about the process will be shared as they are developed. The final results will also be shared with WELS congregations.

Reasons Teens Give for Not Attending Church

The sermons don't speak to teens. Teens comment that preachers often tell businessmen, husbands, wives, workers, and lost people how the Bible relates to their situations, but they rarely relate it to what teens are facing.

Teens are too often stereotyped. When teens are mentioned by pastors or other worship leaders, too often it is with stereotypes, which turn teens off.

Teens feel they aren't understood by church leaders. Teens can overlook the lack of understanding if leaders will admit that they don't know something about teenage life and make an effort to learn more about teens and teen-life situations.

Worship doesn't make a difference in their parents' lives. Teens will often go to church because their parents tell them it's important. But once teens discovered that it was a show for their parents and their parents' lives were no different because of the experience, the teens decided that worship was unnecessary and unreal.

From: *Living with Teenagers*, February-2002, a monthly magazine for parents of teens. <<http://www.lifeway.com>>



What Does This Mean . . . For Us?

- ◆ Only 46% of churchgoing adults and 42% of churchgoing teenagers say their church challenges their thinking.

Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations, Search Institute, 1990

- ◆ Only 35% of 5-6th graders say their church classes make them think.

Group Publishing National Survey, 1992

- ◆ Only 40% of adults and 45% of teenagers say their church encourages them to ask questions.

Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations, Search Institute, 1990

living

LivingBold: A Virtual Youth Group

The CYD staff and WELS Web Services are exploring ways to make the *LivingBold* website for teens <www.livingbold.net> more interactive. The possibility exists that *LivingBold* could even offer a “virtual youth group” where every week or couple weeks teens or whole youth groups from all over the country could log on at one time and participate in chats, discussions, and even Bible classes at the same time. WELS has engaged a web-conferencing company called “Genesis” which would enable *LivingBold* to offer real-time voice and visual conferencing, discussions using things like Power Point, etc. Watch for more details about this exciting prospect. In the mean time, tell your teens about the *LivingBold* site and get them on it.

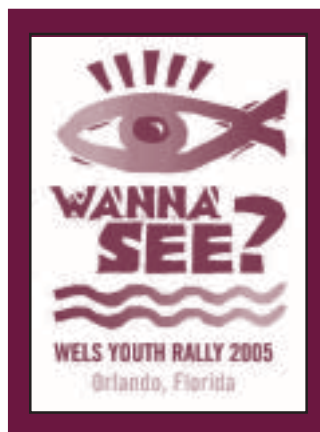
REACH!

Over 3,000 to Attend 2005 Rally!

On Monday, January 10th, 2005, (37 days before the actual registration deadline) the 3,000 registration limit for this summer's youth rally in Lake Buena Vista, Florida was reached. Additional space was found at the rally site, permitting 10 more congregations to participate. The total number now stands at 3,136 registrations (2,359 youth and 777 youth leaders). 242 congregations, representing all 12 WELS districts, will attend the "Wanna See?" rally. 32 congregations (285 people) have their registrations on the waiting list. Four congregations requested removal from this list.

In 2003, 75 congregations were unable to get into the rally. For 2005, the International Youth Rally Planning Committee expanded the allowable number of participants to 3,000 as a reasonable goal. That number would be 500 more people than the 2003, Estes Park, CO rally and hopefully enough to get everyone in. The Lord, how-

ever, has blessed interest in this summer's rally beyond all hopes. While being able to accommodate 3,136 participants, there are still 32 congregations on the waiting list. At 3,136 the 2005 rally will be an all time record, besting the 2003 record by 650 people.



Estimating a participant count that is optimistic yet realistic, and that does not expose the WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship to paying thousands of dollars for unused accommodations, is not easy. Because facilities contracts need to be signed almost a year in advance, a somewhat solid number of expected participants must be derived. If the Rally Committee overestimates too much, WELS CYD must pay for the underage. As

the International Youth Rally Planning Committee starts thinking about 2007, they again will discuss expanding the participant number, but who actually decides to register is in the Lord's hands.

Please contact us with any questions or for further information.