



REACH!

Produced by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Commission on Youth Discipleship

Youth Connected to Adults

by Dr. Joel Nelson, Administrator – WELS Youth Discipleship

YOUTH CONNECTED TO ADULTS *the research supports it:*

- A University of California-San Francisco study found that youth are more resilient when they experience the non-exploitive interest, care, and support of at least one adult during childhood—a parent or grandparent, aunt or uncle, older brother or sister, coach or teacher, pastor or youth leader—an adult with no hidden agenda.
- A study cited in *Children of Fast Track Parents* concludes that, “time and again the consistent emotional support of at least one loving adult can help [youth] overcome all sorts of chaos and deprivation.”
- Studies of children of divorce demonstrates that academic performance is significantly higher when grandparents, other relatives, or adult friends are present to offer physical, emotional, and spiritual support.
- Research reveals positive effects on seniors who remain involved with younger generations.

YOUTH CONNECTED TO ADULTS *the Bible encourages it:*

- “One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts” (Psalm 145:4).

- “I will utter hidden things, things from of old—what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done” (Psalm 78:2-4).
- “Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come” (Psalm 71:18).

YOUTH CONNECTED TO ADULTS *the church benefits from it:*

- A wealth of “lived then, saw this, been there, done that” history, knowledge, experience and insight can be shared by adults/seniors with youth.
- The life-long value of a spiritual foundation and Christ-centered roots can be demonstrated by adults/seniors to youth just beginning to grow into adulthood and to youth who sometimes start growing in the wrong directions.
- A mentoring influence and loving individual attention can be given by adults/seniors to youth who sometimes fly under the radar, fall through the cracks, or are barely hanging on.

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Comments about this

REACH!

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

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- Relief can be given and strain lessened for parents and youth ministers when other adults/senior hands and hearts join in the congregation’s youth ministry. Adult/senior members praying for the youth ministry and its individual youth helps a lot, too.

Youth connected to adults—research supports it, the Bible encourages it, the church benefits from it. Begin by creating fun connections between the generations in order to establish some relationships. Get whoever you can from the youth and adults (parents/seniors/others) in the congregation to make something happen. Keep it simple, make it fun, build in a spiritual component. Then let the relationships go where they may.

SOME THINGS I HAVE TRIED:

- Youth group members/congregation teens challenge parents/other adults/seniors to volleyball, softball, horseshoe, a special obstacle course you create, eating contests, talent competition, card games, Nintendo Wii, etc.
- Youth and parents/other adults/seniors attend “outside of church” events together, riding on the same bus or in cars together: professional sports game, musical concert, places of interest, tours. Assign seating to have the different ages sitting with each other in whatever transportation mode they use. Provide everyone with a card of “Getting to Know You” questions on it that they must work through before they get to the final destination and on the way back.
- Youth and parents/other adults/seniors work together on church/community projects: painting the parsonage, church work day, painting city fire hydrants, cleaning up a local park, etc. Take breaks for snacks, music, etc.
- Invite youth and adults to special seasonal parties: Harvest Party/Dance (full costumes required, prizes given); Christmas Party/Caroling (bonfire at end); youth

do a Palm Sunday brunch for Seniors; parents/other adults/seniors throw a DJ dance for youth. Decorate. Have give-aways.

- Organize a joint meeting of teens and seniors. Have food and music. Divide into mixed age pairs or small groups and ask each other things like: What was the worst storm you can remember? What scares you? What did you do on your very first date? What is the best memory you have of Christmas? What’s the worst punishment you ever had? What’s the dumbest thing you have ever done?
- Bring teens and adults/seniors together for listening sessions and focus groups about congregational ministry issues. Have a joint Bible class periodically about a topic that teens and adults can both relate to.

Begin each event/activity with a short devotion/prayer. Make things fun with food, music, and ice-breaker activities of some kind.

Digitally record parts of it for showing to the whole congregation or posting on the church Web site. Use gyms, people’s homes, rented space, tents, local parks, whatever you can think of. Some things will obviously take more effort to “pull off” than others, but none of this is rocket science.



Finally, to those who would say, “You can’t get the different age groups to interact anymore” I say, “You sure can, as long as what you are doing is fun, engaging, reasonably scheduled, a limited commitment, includes key teen/adult/senior leaders, has great “cheerleaders” to get others excited about it, involves more personal invitations, and is “sold” to every-

one as a great way for all to grow in Christ. Then leave the results to God. If a few people join in great! If a lot join in greater!! Bottom line: if connecting the generations together has benefits (social, emotional, relational, spiritual) then we need to do whatever it takes to make something happen.

Part 3 Survey Says . . .

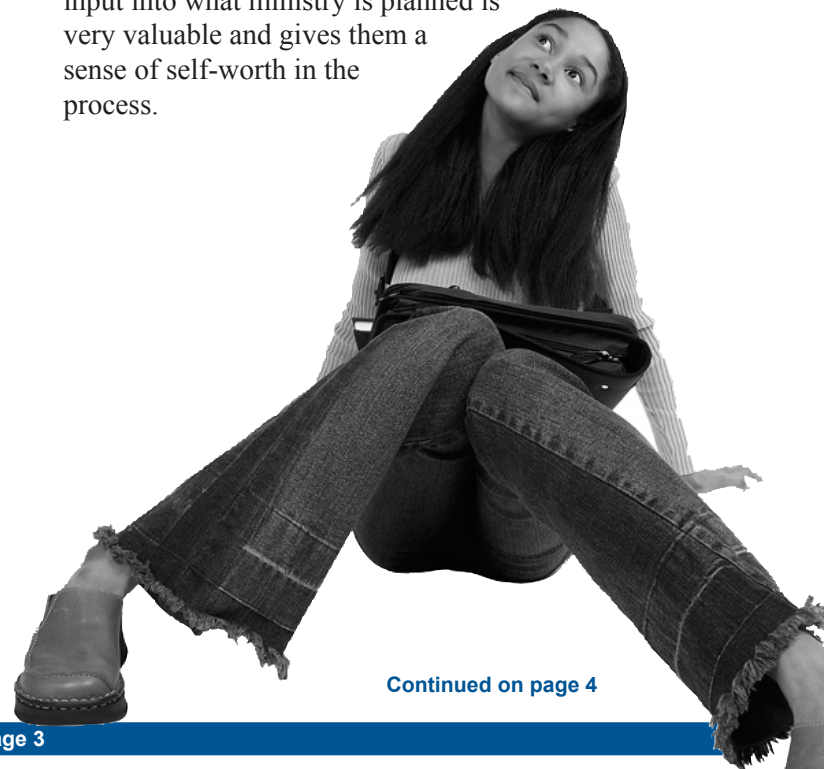
In the last issue of REACH! we shared responses from a survey taken by 117 WELS pastors and youth leaders. We share more responses in this issue.

Survey question

“What value should the [youth leader] place on the involvement of teens themselves in planning any ministry to them?”

Of the 117 responses, 13 (11%) felt there was little value in allowing teens to be part of youth ministry planning. 26 (22%) felt there was some value in allowing teens to be part of youth ministry planning. 78 (67%) felt there was great value in allowing teens to be part of youth ministry planning. Some responses from this latter group...

- I think this is HUGE. You can't expect teens to "champion a cause from scratch." I think they need structure to enable them to determine activities, charities, civic involvement, etc. The [youth leader] AND the parents need to encourage (possibly "force") teens to meet and provide structure so that they—as a group—can determine what they want to do. And then, the leader can support those activities to come to fruition.
- Leadership and ownership of a project is key. If you give youth the parameters of what you're looking for and the budget, they love to organize and run with the details.
- It is always good to know what the kids are thinking and that they have something more powerful than themselves or friends that can help them through difficult times. I think that they feel they are all alone, that their parents and teachers don't understand them. The more we can involve them, the better.
- There is very high value in involving the teens in planning ministry. If the teens aren't engaged, they aren't going to learn and grow. One of the best ways to get the kids engaged is to allow them the opportunity to assist in planning.
- Teens really like the idea of being involved in making decisions. Their feelings get hurt and they "shut down" quickly if they feel they are not taken seriously, though. Also, although they may sound very adult at times they usually still need step-by-step guidance and reminding.
- Significant. Teens are able to help and through their involvement they will better understand the wide scope of ministry. Giving teens responsibility is also developing leaders for the present and future church.
- HUGE. I have found that the most drive, enthusiasm, and momentum come when they plan aspects of their own program. However, this has also blown up on me. It really depends on the teen. Some will follow through on what they say they will do, others seem very enthusiastic during the planning stage and then never follow through. It has not discouraged me from involving them heavily in the planning, however, and our most successful Bible Studies, outreach activities, fun activities, etc. have come when it was THEIR idea.
- An activity planned by teens for teens will be more accepted than just "spoon-feeding" them or forcing. Teens plan . . . youth leaders help organize.
- A HIGH VALUE - Help teens to recognize their God-given talents and further help them to develop ministry ideas for such talents.
- Teen involvement is essential. Teens are pushing their limits in their effort to be in charge of their lives. A ministry that does not involve its clientele in planning and administering and in actual ministry is running counter to its own purpose.
- Highly. They need to feel valued and worthy of the planning. Many times, the teens will feel that they don't have much say in anything, not just the church. So their input into what ministry is planned is very valuable and gives them a sense of self-worth in the process.



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Survey question

What value should the [youth leader] place on the involvement of teens' parents in the ministry to teens?

LivingBold Helps Make A Difference

This expression of thanks was recently sent to LivingBold, WELS Web site for teens:

okay either i'm really lazy to search or i couldn't find a thank you column. so i'm thanking you here. thank you whoever answered my questions. it was really helpful. the bible references were so perfect. i'm glad i found this site. it was the first time i wrote yesterday and the answers were accurate guides to what i was exactly looking for. good job. God bless you. thank you once again. and thank you lord for making me stumble across this site.

Of the 117 responses, 18 (15%) felt there was little value in involving parents in the youth ministry. 33 (28%) felt there was some value in involving parents in the youth ministry. 66 (56%) felt there was great value in involving parents in the youth ministry. Some responses from this latter group:

- Top value. The parents still have the greatest effect on the teens.
- Very valuable, so that it should be the other way around: the parents running the teen ministry and looking for ways to get the youth leader involved!
- Encourage it and rejoice in it when it is present. Youth leader year is short and teen involvement in church teen groups is short. Use what is available and encourage more, but don't despair or give up if parents are not involved right away.
- This is extremely important. You have to be careful, however, with not breaking confidences and trusts, while at the same time working with the parents to help everyone involved.
- Huge value!! If they don't get on board, most of their children won't. They are your best resource, in order to help you understand their teens better, and as your potential "work force" for any formal teen ministry. They may have the best ideas for what will work best, and if it's their idea, they have already taken ownership of that idea and will be more likely to work toward it.
- It's important to play a role in fostering communication between the teens and their parents. It's also important that the youth leader has some insight into who that teen is - who better to know that than the parents. It can be a very tricky role though, because when problems arise—serious problems—the youth leader needs to be ready to assist in support and encouragement.
- High. Include them whenever possible. Set up activities and even classes to promote healthy relationships between parents and teens. Both sides really do want it, but teens often won't admit it and parents admit it, but don't know how to do it.
- This is HUGE! Their parents are still the highest rated influence on them (even higher than peers). Keep in mind that the youth leader is only with them a short time while the parent(s) are with them for the long haul.
- It should be at the top!!! Parental involvement is crucial during this developmental period. It is almost as crucial as parental involvement during infancy and childhood. Youth leaders don't need to be the teens' parental replacement for love.
- Great importance. Parents influence for life. A youth leader influences for a couple years and a little more based on good relationships. Teach and work with parents to be a strong influence and your work with those teens will go well beyond your time.
- This should be viewed as #1, #2, and perhaps #3 in importance. A program really will not gain wide acceptance without it (We are seeing this happen again with a large local church attempting to set up a teen program without taking this step.).
- HUGE. I have found that the most committed teens tend to come from the most committed families. I've tried hard to "get" the teens from families that are lukewarm about church/Bible class attendance, or otherwise not involved in church. You can, once in a while, but it's really, really hard. Teens do tend to emulate what they see their parents doing.
- High value. Parental support will allow the ministry to have greater continuity from year to year. Without parental involvement, one youth leader leaves and teens wait until the next one to see if they will get involved again.
- Utmost. If the parents don't make the kids be involved, they likely won't be. Partner with the parents; don't offer to do their job for them.



Time to Serve

*by Jason Goede
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“Service learning” has become an educational buzz word, and colleges are interested in applicants who have logged volunteer time, in addition to strong academics and extra-curricular involvement. Children are typically introduced to service projects in grade school, through mission money collections and food drives. As these children mature into teenagers and young adults, their talents also mature and diversify. What a wonderful witnessing opportunity it is for these youth to come to the aid of the community and demonstrate the love of God working in their hearts. Students are also taught about how such projects please our Lord.

What students are not taught is how to manage their time. We live in an increasingly busy society. Organizing young people for service projects is not as easy as it once was. Extra-curricular activities, jobs, transportation issues, and coordinating the schedules of busy teens, parents, and teachers present obstacles. Dates for such activities—whether they be one-time events or weekly activities—must be chosen well in advance to allow student participation. Students need to realize the value of including service to others in their lives and be taught how to prioritize.

Finding service opportunities for young people is the easiest part of the process. Non-profit agencies and community groups will always have more needs than volunteers. The more difficult part may be selecting volunteer opportunities that will appeal to your group. High schools have the

advantage of having many students and can offer a variety of potential experiences. Youth groups and other smaller settings may need to be more selective in finding a good fit for the group.

Preparing youth for what they may experience is an essential—and frequently overlooked—aspect of service planning. Giving your volunteers an idea of what they will experience will ensure that your group will make the best use of their God-given gifts. Ensuring that students enjoy what they are doing makes it more likely that they will be willing to volunteer for something again.

While it’s true that serving our Lord is not always supposed to be easy, teaching our children to serve requires setting them up for success when they do. The more opportunities made available, the more preparation provided for the students, and the more fun and friendship the experience allows makes it all the more likely that when students do volunteer, they are doing so with a cheerful heart. The Lord said in Matthew 25:40, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” What better reason for teaching our children to serve others and providing ways for them to do so is there than that?

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Give These a Peek

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



A Lutheran Church Missouri Synod Web site, called **thESource**, exists “to provide Jesus-centered resources for those at work with youth in the Lutheran congregation and beyond.” With discernment you can find some very helpful resources for your own youth ministry.

<http://www.spiritualdevelopmentcenter.org/>



SEARCH Institute’s “Center for Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence” shares the results of its international study (2006-08) on 7,000 youth/young adults, ages 12-25, from 17 countries. The study findings and the “Potential Implications for Practice” could help you rethink aspects of your ministry to youth. While several parts of the study and findings would cause Lutherans concern, there is enough “good stuff” to foster discussion and improvement in how we are ministering to today’s youth.

What Youth Leaders Need to Know

You’re in charge of introductions. Students aren’t likely to flock to you to make friends. They’re still trying to figure out how to relate to people their own age—and you’re old! In most cases, you’ll have to ask questions to make the conversation move at all (“What’s your name?” “What school do you go to?” “What sports do you like?” etc.). If you feel like you’re talking to a wall, move on to someone else, and then say hello again the next week. It may take a few months before students trust you enough to initiate conversation with you.

Personal rejection isn’t personal. You may find yourself in a situation where students are flocking to the young, charismatic, funny youth leader. There will be a small, talkative mob around the youth leader, and a quiet spot close to where you’re standing. Just keep in mind that the youth leader went through the same thing when he or she started this job. Time pays off in relationships with teenagers.

Surprises come in teenage packages. Teenagers aren’t much different today than they were back when you were one, but they have far more powerful toys. Drugs are stronger, communication is more technical, pornography is immediately available, and the world gives teenagers far more grown-up decisions to make. Don’t be surprised if they don’t know how to make them.

As a youth volunteer, you have the chance to bite your tongue, take a deep breath, and overcome the reaction that the student’s parents have already had. This is the time to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger (James 1:19). You can be the one to counsel lovingly and maybe even win trust where no one else can. Just be prepared for a few shocks along the way.

The above is a small excerpt from Church Volunteer Central (CVC), a resource of Group Incorporated (<http://www.churchvolunteercentral.com/>). Online training helps and a whole host of other resources are free to CVC members at no charge as part of your congregation’s \$119.99/year subscription. With discernment you can find some very helpful resources for your own youth ministry.

Is your youth group/youth ministry doing something that would benefit others if they learned about it? Send your story to **REACH!** cyd@sab.wels.net

Please contact us with any questions or for further information.

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