



REACH!

Produced by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Commission on Youth Discipleship

Cutting off Mickey's Other Ear

by Pastor Matthew Doebler

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Several decades ago, church leaders and Christian parents perceived that teens were different than other generations and were leaving the church in droves. At that time, many churches began to create what family pastor Mark DeVries calls "the one-eared mickey mouse." It was a movement to retain teens by containing and entertaining them. So, teens were herded into their own group with little connection to the other generations of the church. There they were entertained in an attempt to make ministry so "fun" that no one wanted to do anything else except come to youth group on Sunday nights.

At first, it appeared to be a success. Church calendars were filled with sock hops, tobogganing, lock-ins, bowling parties—even the occasional leaf rake or shut-in visits. Thriving youth groups popped up around the country, usually led by a young, vibrant Youth Pastor who played guitar, was fairly "cool", taught Bible studies on demonism and acted like a total goofball on outings. But the overall impact of these groups was low. They did not keep kids in the church; in fact, the opposite often happened. After being entertained as a special group for four years and generally forgotten for the next four to eight while they went off to college, many had little desire of returning to the reality of congregational life: discipleship, service, commitment, etc.

And, as time goes on, teens have become somewhat bored with church entertainment. With computers, internet, dvd's, game-cubes, mega-malls, year-round sports programs, hundreds of stations on the television, and the rising number of teens with jobs, how can the church keep up? Entertainment does not change lives; and it does not retain teens. Something better is bound to come along.[1]

A congregation was recently thinking about walling off a section of the church basement for a "teen center" with ping-pong tables and other games. Again, this was the contain and entertain concept. "Maybe if we make a special room for them, we can retain them. We can try to minister to them apart from the rest of the group. If we just give them a few games, they will be happy. They'll keep coming to church." But it will not work. Something better is bound to come along.

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REACH!

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

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*Today's
teens
are
global.
They
want to
make a
difference
in their
world.*

(“Cutting Off. . .” continued from page 1)

Furthermore, this contain and entertain trend was bound to fail because it made two major mindset mistakes. One, it further diminished the focus on ministering to families where faith is ultimately modeled and maintained by mom and dad. By the time children reach the teenage years, their spiritual outlook is pretty well set by what they experienced at home all the other years. Starting special ministry for them during the teen years is about thirteen years too late.[2] Two, it further cut teens off from the other generations of the family and the church where Christian adulthood could be modeled. Mark DeVries writes, “Our goal in youth ministry is not simply to get teenagers into a relationship with Jesus Christ. We are called to make disciples—men and women who are moving toward Christian maturity and obedience. One cannot move toward Christian maturity alone. One may be able to become a mature Buddhist monk alone. One may be able to become a master in New Age religion alone. But one cannot be a mature Christian adult in isolation from other believers.”[3] These major mistakes in mindset would inevitably lead to disastrous results, and they did.

What can be done to buck this trend and really reach teens for life and service in God’s kingdom? I have more questions than answers, but here are a few thoughts.

1. The best way to retain teens is to solidify their faith when they are much younger. Consider investing more

time and effort into family ministry instead of teen ministry. Teen ministry will most likely show immediate and short-term results. Family ministry will bear long-term fruit.

2. Today’s teens are global. They want to make a difference in their world. Offer them opportunities to make a real difference in the lives of others in their church and their community.
3. Once you have them interested in making a difference in the world around them, then you will have their ears open to make a difference in their own lives. They will be ready to hear what God has to say to them about their failures, Christ’s forgiveness and Christ’s direction for their lives.
4. A Bible study tied into other ministry that makes a difference has potential to impact more kids in a better learning environment than a classroom.
5. Remember that youth groups bring together unnatural groups. Most often a youth group function is made up of a bunch of kids who would not “hang out” together in a normal setting. If you do not give them a common purpose or ministry, if you do not emphasize their unity in Christ as they serve others, you will only be able to sustain their connection with each other artificially at youth events.
6. Try to think less of teen ministry in terms of a separate group. While they can do some things as a group, think of ways to tie them into the intergenerational ministry of the church. How can teens mature into Christian adults if they are only with Christian teens all the time? They need to see maturity modeled for them.
7. Don’t think of teen ministry as a monster that must be appeased with more programs, more money, many more volunteers, more stress and more staff. Sure, teen ministry is work, just like all other ministry. But you might find less is more – less events, more opportunities for service.
8. Balance all five purposes of youth ministry: outreach, worship, fellowship, discipleship and service.
9. Think in terms of making a difference at every youth event. Start with this simple mindset: “We will not do any youth ministry without making a difference, without an element of real Bible study, service, outreach or worship.”

Last year, we made a vow at St. Paul's: we would do everything we could to give teens an opportunity to make a difference at every teen event. So, what were we going to do about the annual Great America trip? We decided to find a church which could use some help with ministry on the way down. In exchange, we would ask them for lodging and a few meals. The day after doing ministry, the kids would go to Great America.

During the Great America Mission trip, the kids put flyers on over a thousand homes, canvassed a neighborhood, cleaned pews, cleaned out several school rooms and painted a bathroom. During the day, they interacted with other Christian kids and adults of all ages. They made a difference. Their lives were changed. A few months later, a mom and some friends from the church drove up to visit some of our kids. One girl who had been straying for the months in between came back to worship on a regular basis after some encouragement from her new friends.

Few people can remember the Great America trip two years ago. It's long been thrown upon the enormous pile of yesterday's entertainment. But the Great America mission trip was different. Those who came were changed. Bonds were formed, even between different generations. Fellow Christians were ministered to. Unchurched people were reached. Kids weren't entertained so much while painting bathrooms, but they sure learned a lot about serving others. I'm confident it's a lesson they won't soon forget.

[1] For more on the ineffectiveness of entertainment as it relates to worship and personality-driven ministry see pp. 146 – 171 of "ChurchNext: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry" Copyright 2000 by Eddie Gibbs.

[2] For much more information on the importance of family ministry see "The Family Friendly Church" Copyright 1998 by Ben Fruedenburg with Rick Lawrence.

[3] P. 168, "Family-Based Youth Ministry" Copyright 1994, Mark DeVries.

WELS Youth Rally Insight

The planning for the 2003 International Youth Rally is in its final stages. Information about the Estes Park rally can be found at <www.welsyouthrally.net>. More information will be shared with participating congregations and their group members via another mailing coming out in early March. Questions may be directed to Mrs. Kris Snyder (ksnyder@sab.wels.net). Below Pastor Kurt Ebert, CYD Coordinator for the Nebraska District shares his views on why the rally is so special:

Why encourage your kids to go [to the rally]? Besides the obvious (an emphasis on God's Word and worship) I see two big benefits to an experience like this.

First: Celebration. There is a place for celebration in the Christian life—not just goofy entertainment, but the excitement and thrill of joining a couple thousand other teens for no other reason than that we are united by faith in an awesome Savior into a body that will rejoice together forever.

Second: Friends. Lots of kids are hungry for friends that share their hope. (As one girl put it in an evening teen study, "This is the only group of kids I know where I can actually say what I believe and be accepted for it.")

A large emphasis of this year's youth rally will be offering forums where groups of fifteen or twenty kids can reflect on what they've heard at the plenary sessions and digest it through discussion. There will be less offered by way of sectionals, but more offered in the area of small group/relationship building gathers.

The 2003 WELS International Youth Rally filled to capacity on February 4th.

Top 10 Pick Up Lines to Use at Church

10. "Hi, this pew taken?"
9. "My prayers are answered."
8. "What's a charismatic like you doing in a mainline place like this?"
7. "How about we go over to my place for a little devotional."
6. "Hi, angel!"
5. "Don't worry, I'm attracted to you purely in a spiritual way."
4. "I'm Lutheran, what's your sign?"
3. "I think you're sitting on my Bible."
2. "Read any good Bible passages lately?"
1. "So, worship here often?"

“SURVEY SAYS...” A LOT!

A written survey of 216 WELS high school freshman and seniors (students at one of our area Lutheran high schools) produced the following results. The survey was given after a short presentation about CYD ministry by Administrator Nelson. Five of the survey questions follow with the percentage each choice was selected following the item.

Which phrase best describes what you knew about CYD before the presentation?

- a. I didn't know squat (76%),
- b. I knew a couple of things (20%),
- c. I knew more than I thought I did (2%),
- d. I know more than Joel Nelson and should have his job (2%)!

CYD is of the opinion that helping parents become better at their God-given role should be CYD's number one task. What do you think?

- a. I strongly agree (26%),
- b. I somewhat agree (67%),
- c. I disagree (5%),
- d. I strongly disagree (2%).

CYD has an electronic magazine (e-zine) for teens that is called *Living Bold* (www.livingbold.net). Which phrase best describes you relative to this site?

- a. I never heard of it (93%),
- b. I've heard of it but have never visited it (7%),
- c. I visited it once or twice but never again (0%).
- d. I visit it regularly (0%).

CYD sponsors an International Youth Rally every two years at various locations around the country. Which phrase best describes you:

- a. I have never gone to one (81%),
- b. I have gone and my impression was negative (4%),
- c. I have gone and my impression was positive (15%).

As a national church body, how well do you think WELS recognizes what teens today really need in order to grow spiritually?

- a. WELS understands and is doing everything it can (28%).
- b. WELS is trying to understand but has a ways to go (44%).
- c. WELS really does not get it at all (7%).
- d. I really don't know what to answer (21%).

YOUTH MINISTRY OUTSOUND T BITES

The Winter Fun Event

Charlotte Schears, a member of the Northern Wisconsin District Youth Discipleship Committee sent *REACH!* a brief description of a district-wide activity conducted in Northern Wisconsin. It is called the “Winter Fun Event” and includes an outside/expert speaker on a timely topic – like peer pressure – along with some fun activity like snow tubing. Teens and parents from around the district converge at the event site and enjoy fellowship and friendship with each other. The “Winter Fun Event” is a great way to build relationships and networks between district teens, parents, and congregations. Charlotte says, “You never know how these things will fly but I pray that God will bless our efforts. I know that no success comes without His help.” Charlotte also said that her district’s Youth Discipleship Committee is very active in helping Northern Wisconsin District congregations get a youth group started or revitalized.

Perhaps more important than Charlotte’s help is her spirit revealed in these words: “I am a lay person, and I love working with kids, especially teens! As a youth leader, I believe that I can assist our youth best by offering them opportunities to learn more about their Lord. Not so much through me but by encouraging them to attend those opportunities such as youth rallies, workshops, retreats, fellowship activities, classes, and the like. Not only encouraging them, but providing the organization to get them there – arranging transportation, handling registrations, seeking every youth out to let them know we do care about them spiritually, showing them respect and then participating side by side with them at the activity – all the while growing in faith and knowledge of God and His will right along with the youth.”

Thanks Charlotte for sending in that sound bite. If you want to learn more about the “Winter Fun Event” or what Charlotte and her committee are doing, email her: char_schears@hotmail.com. You can also contact your own CYD District Coordinator. Go to the WELS webpage (www.wels.net), click on the word “Ministry” then on the words “Youth Discipleship.” You will be taken to the CYD site where at the bottom right you can access the directory of District Coordinators.

LivingBold

Keeps WELS Teens Connected

George Barna's *Real Teens: A Contemporary Snapshot of Youth Culture* (2001) describes today's teens this way: "For today's young people routine is the enemy. They love the hectic, unpredictable, ever-changing, fast pace of their existence. When things seem to get slow or predictable, they deem life too boring and meaningless. To most young people, a life that lacks surprises and discontinuity seems to be no life at all" (pg. 25). Barna's annual survey of 1200, 13-18 year olds, revealed that teens feel two things must be incorporated into their experience: #1 is relationships and #2 is the media.

In a typical day, 96% of teens polled spend free time with friends and are more likely to have a meaningful conversation with them than with their mother (70%), father (53%), or God (67%). Regarding media use in a typical day, 94% of the teens polled listen to the radio, 91% play audiocassettes or compact discs, 89% watch television, 69% read a magazine, 58% read part of a book in a typical day, 52% use the internet, 79% use a computer (in many cases involving exposure to the internet).

This data affirms something the WELS Commission on Youth

Discipleship (CYD) has developed and piloted during the past year. It's called *LivingBold* and is an online, electronic magazine (e-zine) for WELS teens. *LivingBold* (www.livingbold.net) exists to...

- ◆ Assist teens in growing in their relationship with Jesus through contact with the Word.
- ◆ Provide teens with morally positive places to visit on the web which will provide them with useful information, entertainment, empathetic support and

spiritual encouragement, and a better understanding of the way God works in a world broken by sin.

- ◆ Promote grace-motivated, Christian values and lifestyles.

- ◆ Help youth interpret issues in their personal lives and in the world according to Biblical principles.

- ◆ Encourage Christian teens to share the gospel in word and action with other Christians and with those unaware of the gospel.

- ◆ Encourage Christian teens to develop and use the creative gifts God has given them. Encourage friendships between Christian peers that are not limited to physical proximity.

- ◆ Provide a caring and positive place for teens to meet and minister to each other. Highlight for subscribers online ministries and resources that are available within this denomination and those affiliated with WELS.



LB is now moving to a new level. The development and pilot period, under the able direction of Pastor James Aderman (Fairview Lutheran Church – Milwaukee) is completed and CYD intends to keep pushing forward with improvements.

According to "Web Trends," a service that monitors WELS website activity, *LB* gets 3,500 visits per month (237 per day average). The average visit length is 10 minutes, 54 seconds. 6.87% are international visits, 74.95% are from the United States, and 18.16% are from unknown origin. During the month of December, for example, there were 1,576 one time visits and 376 multiple time visits.



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("LivingBold. . ." continued from page 5)

12 WELS teens from around the country (see names below) have been working with CYD to evaluate the site and make suggestions for improvement. Some of these teens will remain as an informal "think tank" to continue providing ideas and evaluation. A couple others will assume more "hands on" management of the site. On February 8, four of the teens (Abby Kroken, Lindsay Lutzke, Jeremy Fredrich, and Cody Jensen) participated in a "face-to-face" meeting with the CYD staff and the WELS Webmaster and her staff to discuss the *LB* retool even more. The meeting was "face-to-face" in that some of the participants were in Milwaukee while others were in Minnesota, connected via video

LivingBold "Think Tank" Members

- | | | |
|-----------------|---|--------------|
| Bethany Andrade | – | Washington |
| Amos Barkeim | – | Minnesota |
| Jason Dahl | – | Wisconsin |
| Jeremy Fredrich | – | Minnesota |
| Andrew Gades | – | Minnesota |
| Aaron Henselin | – | Michigan |
| Cody Jensen | – | Minnesota |
| Abby Kroken | – | Wisconsin |
| Matthew Leins | – | South Dakota |
| Lindsay Lutzke | – | Wisconsin |
| Bethany Rossman | – | Wisconsin |
| Ian Watson | – | California |

conferencing equipment at WELS national headquarters and Martin Luther College.

Joel Nelson, CYD Administrator said, "I am so impressed with the attitude, insights, intelligence, and spirituality of these teens. Having WELS teens help manage the website for WELS teens is a no-brainer." Nelson said, that it is possible that computer classes or clubs from select area Lutheran high schools could also assist with on-going *LB* management. CYD also intends to add three teens to the planning committee for the 2005 WELS International Youth Rally.

In a broader sense, CYD hopes that creating ways for teens to serve in ministry at the national level, will move districts and congregations to consider engaging teens in vital ministry at those levels.

Please contact us with any questions or for further information.

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