



# REACH!

Produced by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Commission on Youth Discipleship

## 7 "Steps" to More Youth-full Churches

by Dr. Joel Nelson, Administrator – WELS Youth Discipleship

Recent issues of *REACH!* have included articles about the national research study: *Why Young People Leave WELS*, as well as, information about the newly posted "Creating Youth-full Churches" Bible studies/discussion guides that flowed out of the research findings. These can be found at [www.wels.net/jump/youthstudy](http://www.wels.net/jump/youthstudy).

As I have pondered the data, reflected on the findings, and processed through the discussions, seven key themes kept emerging in my mind. The more I think about these themes, the more I am convinced of their value in assisting congregations to improve their ministries to young people. Congregations—and congregation leaders—willing to reflect on the seven themes and then consider ways to improve in each, will have taken the vital, first step toward becoming more youth-full.

The seven themes are Parents, Preaching, Teaching, Worship, Respect, Engagement, and Recognition. What follows from various sources are additional insights useful to the reflection/evaluation process.

### Parents

- "Far and away, parents are seen as the most important influence affecting young adults' religious attitudes and practices." *B. Goodman, Why Young People Leave WELS (2005)*
- "WELS needs to lobby parents more aggressively, communicating the critical role they play in their children's future WELS relationship." *B. Goodman, Why Young People Leave WELS (2005)*

- "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 – 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)*
- "In all the studies we've accumulated over the years regarding what influences [youth], parents continue to be the most influential shapers of a person's life—either positively or negatively." *Ben Freudenburg, The Family Friendly Church (1998)*

### Preaching

- "Only 19 percent of churchgoing adults say they usually learn a lot from their pastor's sermons." *Group Publishing Poll of Churchgoers, (1992)*
- "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)*
- "WELS pastors...need to better tune in to the needs and interests of their young adult members." *B. Goodman, Why Young People Leave WELS (2005)*
- "65% of church visitors cite 'quality of sermons' for why they returned to a church a second time." *WELS Parish Services White Paper on Assimilation (2004)*

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## REACH!

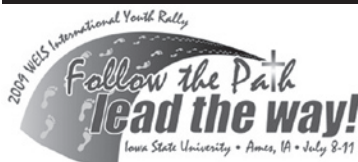
and ideas for future issues can be directed to . . .

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# Rally Information Available

by Jeremy Bakken  
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Planning for the 2009 Rally is well-underway! If you haven't been to the rally Web site for a while ([www.welsyouthrally.net](http://www.welsyouthrally.net)), there's quite a bit of information available, including:

- Rally Commercial and "WELS Got Talent" contests – compete for cash prizes to benefit your congregation's youth ministry
- Plenary sessions – Set an example IN SPEECH, IN LIFE, IN LOVE, and IN FAITH
- Worship themes – "Follow the Path" and "Lead the Way"
- Information about Adventureland USA and the Iowa State University Campus
- NEW POLICIES for 2009
- RALLY NEWS – sign-up for e-mail delivery of important rally related information

## 7 "Steps" . . . cont. from page 1

- "There is nothing that attaches people to the church as does good preaching." *Melancthon, Article XXIV of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (1530)*

### Teaching

- "After surveying 11,000 adults and youth...in several denominations, researchers Peter Benson and Carolyn Eklin said... 'Involvement in a [quality] Christian education program has the strongest tie to a person's growth in faith... And this is as true for adults as it is for children.'" *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations, Search Institute (1990)*
- "Each [student] brings unique abilities, talents, and also learning styles to the mix. When [teachers] recognize, understand, appreciate, and accommodate the different learning styles...[they] create an environment where all the members truly belong, learn, and grow." *The Word of Life Comes to Life, WELS Parish Services (2002)*

- "WELS leadership at all levels needs to evaluate the current structure, mission and execution of [education] groups with the objective of adding more meaning, growing participation and improving retention." *B. Goodman, Why Young People Leave WELS (2005)*

### Worship

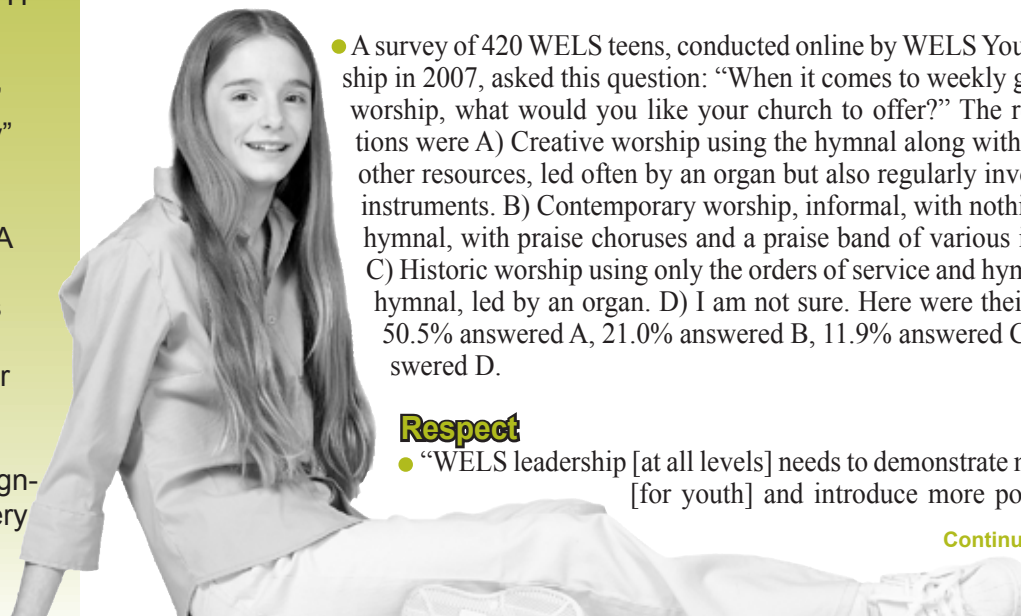
- "Whatever we do, say, or sing in worship [should leave] people with the attitude, 'I want to do this again,' or as the psalmist would sing, 'I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD.'" *Rev. Jim Huebner, Excellence in Worship (1999)*
- "Reduce the degree of repetitiveness in worship services and consider some music variation... Evaluate opportunities/ potential to incorporate some contemporary aspects into religious services... Young people do not necessarily want to alter substance, however, style is where some changes would be welcome." *B. Goodman, Why Young People Leave WELS (2005)*
- "Music and other ambient factors may attract [youth] once or twice, but those elements will not keep them coming back for more. There has to be sufficient substance, quality, hope, and genuine mutual concern and acceptance for them to return." *G. Barna, Barna Research Online (2002)*
- "[In worship] we need to...cultivate excellence and cultivate humble recognition of God's power in simple and unassuming things." *Rev. Bryan Gerlach, WELS Administrator for Worship (2007)*

- A survey of 420 WELS teens, conducted online by WELS Youth Discipleship in 2007, asked this question: "When it comes to weekly group/public worship, what would you like your church to offer?" The response options were A) Creative worship using the hymnal along with a variety of other resources, led often by an organ but also regularly involving other instruments. B) Contemporary worship, informal, with nothing from the hymnal, with praise choruses and a praise band of various instruments. C) Historic worship using only the orders of service and hymns from the hymnal, led by an organ. D) I am not sure. Here were their responses: 50.5% answered A, 21.0% answered B, 11.9% answered C. 16.7% answered D.

### Respect

- "WELS leadership [at all levels] needs to demonstrate more respect [for youth] and introduce more positive roles/

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participation opportunities for young adults. The current feeling that "young adults don't count" needs to be reversed. *B. Goodman, Why Young People Leave WELS (2005)*

- "In addition to a more formalized approach, simply listening better and inviting more constructive [youth] input represents a step in the right direction . . ." *B. Goodman (2005)*
- "We expect adolescents to be immature [and] irresponsible . . . When we say that adolescents are not socially or emotionally mature, what we are saying is that we (as part of our culture) have not expected and demanded maturity of them. Even though they are physically mature, cognitively mature, and morally mature, we have not allowed them to be socially mature. We have expected them to behave in some way less than adult." *Issues in Christian Education (2003)*
- "McDonalds gives more authority to teens than does the church." *Mike Yaconneli (2004)*

### Engagement

- "[Youth] frequently complain that, after confirmation, there is nowhere to go. There is the feeling that young people are not taken seriously, have no meaningful input and play no significant role . . . [Congregations] need to consider possibilities for post confirmation young adult participation where their input is meaningful . . . More needs to be done to provide avenues for involvement . . ." *B. Goodman, Why Young People Leave WELS (2005)*
- "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 in-

involved in the ministry [of the church] . . . One implication is that the individuals who will become the church's leaders two decades from now are probably active in church programs today." *G. Barna, Transforming Your Children into Spiritual Champions (2003)*

- "Youth are not looking for freedom [from the church]; they desire responsibility . . . each church has the responsibility to make them a valued part of ministry." T. Rainer, *The Myth of Freedom (2007)*

### Recognition

- "Leavers tell us that the church did not stay in touch with them and imply that some sort of ongoing communication would be meaningful . . . Further thinking should go into how . . . the church . . . can stay in touch with students leaving home. Related thoughts, such as recognizing college students at church and during holidays, may also be a way to secure the relationships. This type of activity could involve recognition at worship services, receptions and related events/activities. These suggestions merely represent a couple of ideas/first steps . . ." *B. Goodman, Why Young People Leave WELS (2005)*
- "Simply listening better and inviting more constructive [youth] input represents a step in the right direction . . ." *B. Goodman, Why Young People Leave WELS (2005)*
- "Young people are not only the future of our Synod. They are the NOW of our Synod. Treat them not as a nuisance or a burden, but as the wonderful treasures from our gracious God that they really are . . . If you are serious about teen ministry; learn the kids names, acknowledge them and raise them up every chance you get." *2008 CYD Survey, "What to Tell Seminary Middlers"*

## 2009 Youth Rally on MySpace

by Tatum Gormley-Nettles

teen member of the 2009 WELS International Youth Rally Planning Committee

In order to help promote the 2009 WELS International Youth Rally, the Rally Committee created a *MySpace* account. *MySpace* can help users to focus on their positive relationship with Jesus and continue to set a Christ-like example for all our friends and viewers. Hopefully, our Christian attitude and belief will spread-which is our goal. If we are criticized for using something like *MySpace* to share our faith, we should stand our ground on the fact that we are working to be Christian role models to all. I mean, do we exclude those who are lost or help them? I think we should help them!

*MySpace* is just an online sphere of life, which is full of sinners and Christ's followers! Sure, some people's spaces are bad, and sometimes even the spaces of our friends are such. We can't control what they do but we can hope to influence them. The 2009 rally *MySpace* area will be clean, Christian, and constantly managed. Inappropriate comments from friends and spam will be deleted immediately. We will use the 2009 rally *MySpace* to help others "Follow the Path, Lead the Way." That's our responsibility as leaders!

# Raise the Bar on Teen Involvement

by Dr. Joel Nelson Administrator – WELS Youth Discipleship



In many WELS congregations, teens are given fairly basic things to do ministry-wise. While ushering, babysitting, and cleaning up after the pot luck are good ways to serve, they represent some of the simplest, least creative things teens can do. Appointing spiritual, talented, and responsible teens to greater service would be awesome for them and the church.

Teens are extremely busy but they are also craving more adult ministry opportunities. Also, they are still learning and growing, so that means great interest and intentions may not always be followed by finishing the job 100%. If part of the goal is to train/develop your youth while they are helping with the congregation's ministry, then you have to allow for failure, goof ups, let downs, and dropped balls. Teens don't want to be that way, but sometimes are. Of course, the opposite is also true. Teens may blow the adults away with their focus, follow through, attention to detail, seriousness, and passion. CYD has found the teens that we

appoint to the International Youth Rally Planning Committee (nine now after three rallies) are incredibly engaged, spiritual, and talented.

How about raising the bar with what your congregation asks its teens to do? Consider the following things your teens could be asked, trained, and released to do. If you can think of additional ideas, send them to *REACH!*:

- 1 Outreach:** Train teens to connect with/visit prospects who are teens.
- 2 Retention:** Train teens to connect with/visit their peers in the congregation who are straying.
- 3 Nurture:** Train teens – especially girls – to visit mothers/families who have just had a baby, maybe while still in the hospital. Train teens to make hospital visits on peers and younger children who are in the hospital or home with longer-term illnesses.
- 4 Governance:** Appoint teens to an advisory council to the Church Council (CC). Let them react to some of the same issues the CC does and feed back their input to the CC. Maybe even allow representatives of this group to periodically sit on the CC as advisory members.
- 5 Worship:** Appoint teens to whatever committees you have that discuss/evaluate/plan worship. Involve teens in the worship service itself in various ways.
- 6 Stewardship:** Train teen teams to go and give the “every-member-visit” stewardship talk to their peers or even adults.
- 7 Preaching Evaluation:** Appoint teens to an ad hoc group to respectfully “critique” the pastor’s sermons and Bible classes offered in order to provide feedback from the teen perspective.
- 8 Opinion Sharing:** Formulate teens into focus groups to periodically react to things going on at church. Toss out the issue to them and then listen to what they say.
- 9 Teaching:** Train a panel of spiritual/responsible teens to teach their own teen Bible study group at church. Involve teens as teachers and teachers’ aides in Sunday

Continued on page 6

## Survey Says . . .

Each spring CYD conducts a workshop for Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Middlers who will be receiving their vicar calls. Last spring's workshop dealt exclusively with understanding teens. To obtain additional insights to share with the Middlers, CYD ran an online survey of WELS pastors and youth leaders. 117 individuals responded and we'll share some of the results over the next couple *REACH!* issues.

### Question:

*If you could reduce what teens today are like to four words, what would those words be? (More than four words and organized by common themes)*

- Super-involved, pressured, stressed-out, busy, hyper, overwhelmed, over-committed, pressure cookers, over-extended, burdened, over-scheduled, time-starved, over-stimulated
- Self-absorbed, self-centered, want instant satisfaction, spoiled, instant gratification, selfish, present-focused, screwed-up priorities, egocentric
- Searching, searching for identity and truth, curious, questioning, inquisitive, shopping, observing, inquiring, challenging, testing, truth seekers, examining, evaluating, experimenting, experiential
- Emotional, hormonal, uncertain, anxious, scared about future, moody, sensitive, conflicted, confused, afraid to share, impressionable, shy, insecure, self-conscious, needy, hurting, distracted, frightened, irrational, introspective, timid, fickle, lonely, afraid, rollercoasterish, empty
- Peer-centered, social, relational, connected, communal, socially-driven, gregarious, peer-pressured, relationship-seeking, peer-oriented
- Rambunctious, impatient, fun, energetic, eager, easily bored, fun-loving, dramatic, active, outgoing, free-spirited, expressive, creative, resourceful, excitable, dynamic, passionate, zealous, innovative, precocious, over-stimulated, distracted, adventurous, exciting
- Smart, caring, capable, guidable, helpful, talented, dedicated, willing, idealistic, perceptive, observant, world-wise, blessed, educated, untapped, gifted, open, teachable, semi-dependable, intelligent, willing, aware, knowledgeable, resilient, willing to serve, informed, savvy, receptive, bright, underestimated

### Next Issue's Question:

*With what attitude should a [youth leader] come to his ministry with teens?*

## Another Reason to Turn Off the Tube

A University of Buffalo study gave children ages 9-12 1,000 calories of a favorite snack and told them to eat as little or as much as they liked. Those who watched a TV show while eating, consumed twice as many calories as those who didn't. TV watching and high blood pressure were also directly linked in a national survey of 4,500 teens, as analyzed by Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. According to Dr. Goutham Rao of Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, children need 60 minutes of some kind of daily exercise. (Good Housekeeping, July 2007)

## Another Bold Insight from Teens on LivingBold.net

I know that worship is important, and I know that this is what Christians do to thank and praise God and to keep our faith strong, but I do find it hard to focus during the sermon. I think that most teens are looking for something new and exciting and that they have trouble focusing on listening. Teens are just so into learning things visually.

## Tell your friends to get *REACH!*

- 1) Go to [www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship](http://www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship).
- 2) Click on the "Newsletters" image.
- 3) Click on the appropriate, blue "E-mail Notification" link.
- 4) Follow the steps in the "Delivery Methods" box at the very bottom of the page.
- 5) Watch for the e-mail about the new issue.



# REACH!

Raise the Bar . . . cont. from page 4

*Every heart  
without  
Christ is a  
mission field.  
Every heart  
with Christ is  
a missionary.*

school and VBS. Maybe even have some older, confirmed teens present a topic at a confirmation class.

- 10 Community Networking:** Train and allow a group of teens to make regular contact with representatives in the community (mayor, Chamber of Commerce, police chief, librarian, hospital administrators, etc. ) to learn what service opportunities exist in the community and to build networks of congregation teens to potentially address these needs.
- 11 Support:** Train and equip a group of teens to, in various ways, stay in touch with/minister to the members away at college or in the military. Maybe even planning a “Welcome home for the holidays!” activity or a gift give-away that home-on-vacation college members could receive.
- 12 Planning:** Have teens serve as members of long range planning committees.

**Please contact us with any questions or for further information.**