



# REACH!

Produced by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Commission on Youth Discipleship

## Creating Youth-FULL Churches

by Dr. Joel A. Nelson, Administrator – WELS Youth Discipleship

In January of 2006, WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship (CYD) shared the results from its national study: “Why Young People Leave WELS (WYPLW).” The study and all related information can be found at [www.wels.net/jump/youthstudy](http://www.wels.net/jump/youthstudy). As an outgrowth of that study and on the basis of the study’s recommendations, a conceptual framework was developed articulating what youth-**full** churches are like. The play on words with the word “youth-**full**” focuses on an important reality: congregations that succeed at engaging their younger, more youthful members in ministry are congregations that are more youth-**full**. They have more children, teens, and young adults attending and active. In this *REACH!* issue and the next, we’ll share the framework’s four foundational statements and their explanation. What follows are the first two.

**Youth-FULL churches see the vital role they play in the training of youth.**

- Through the example of and partnership with parents (*WYPLW Rec. #1*)
- Through Christian education opportunities (*WYPLW Rec. #6*)
- Through Christ-centered activities (*WYPLW Rec. #3*)

*When it comes to the primary responsibility for the spiritual training of youth, God was clear. His directive to Israelite parents applies to parents of all time: “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deut 6:6-7). Because of his God-given wisdom, Solomon understood the impact Christian education has on children. He said, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov.22:6).*

*Without a doubt, the Christian education of children is important and parents are to be the primary instruments for training their children. Youth-full churches recognize this and do all they can to assist parents to fulfill their God-given responsibility and privilege. They do not replace but rather partner with parents, offering them opportunities to grow spiritually and improve their Christian parenting skills. Youth-full churches also assist parents to fulfill their God-given responsibility and privilege by providing quality, caring, Christ-centered education opportunities through Sunday schools, Lutheran elementary schools, catechism classes, and youth activities.*

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Comments about this

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

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# Principles for Building Youth Group Unity

## Part 2

Last issue we shared the first four principles for building youth group unity: 1) Help teens feel included, 2) Help teens feel safe, 3) See teens as individuals, and 4) Confront problems quickly. Here are the final four principles:

### **Principle 5:** Be positive

*Teens follow your lead. If you have a negative attitude, they likely will, too. And negative attitudes foster disunity in groups. So be enthusiastic and upbeat!*

### **Principle 6:** Be patient

*Teenagers still have a lot of “child” in them. Treat them as adults, but when they don’t behave as you expect them to, avoid coming down hard on them. Accepting teens where they are will do wonders for group unity.*

### **Principle 7:** Balance group and individual time

*Teens don’t need to be together 100 percent of the time. In addition to group-building activities, provide time at your events for teens to be alone or in small groups. This helps them to express their individuality and not be smothered by the “group” identity.*

### **Principle 8:** Encourage teens to care for one another

*As much as teens need adults, they also need each other for support and friendship. Design care-building times that encourage teens to tell each other their concerns and pray for each other. Teens who have a network of friends to encourage them will feel more like a part of the group.*

## **Youth-FULL churches keep young people engaged in worship**

- **By recognizing their needs and interests** (WYPLW Rec. #2)
- **By educating them in matters of worship** (WYPLW Rec. #4 & #5)
- **By seeking to include them in worship opportunities** (WYPLW Rec. #5)
- **By doing worship well** (WYPLW Rec. #4)

*The Lutheran Church has a rich tradition of liturgical worship or formal, public worship that follows historic orders and rites and centers on the Means of Grace. Worshipping and praising God in liturgical ways brings great blessings to all involved, irrespective of chronological age. The Old Testament records that believers, young and old, were taught how the various sacrifices and worship practices showed love and reverence to God. The psalmists aptly captured how much worship means to the truly engaged worshipper: “I love the house where you live, O Lord, the place where your glory dwells” (Ps. 26:8). “I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord’” (Ps. 122:1). Youth-full churches teach how important and relevant liturgical worship remains in the life of a Christian and a Christian congregation. Youth-full churches lead all ages to glorify God through worship that is done truly well.*

*Youth-full churches also recognize that today’s youth may appreciate opportunities to worship in different ways that are true to God’s Word yet provide new variety and increased engagement. Recognizing that children and teens are part of the body of Christ and valuable, talented members of the congregation, youth-full churches will consider how to involve them in planning and presenting worship in ways that glorify God, grow their faith, and strengthen their commitment to the church.*

### **In the next issue:**

- **Youth-full churches demonstrate Christ-like attitudes.**
- **Youth-full churches target youth/young adults for involvement in the church.**

*Brand new, downloadable Bible studies and discussion guides on the Creating Youth-full Churches topics mentioned above, can be found at*

**[www.wels.net/jump/youthstudy](http://www.wels.net/jump/youthstudy)**

*These studies/guides will get your youth and adults talking about making your own church more youth-FULL!*

# Do Your Teens Have a Story to Tell?



Have your teens share their experiences and tell their stories by submitting them to *Forward in Christ* magazine's "Whatever" feature. "Whatever" is written by teens, for teens, and reaches people across the country each month. Articles show how teens rely on God as they face different challenges in their everyday lives.

If you know of teens who would like to submit a story, make sure their story meets the following requirements: 1) is approximately 600 words in length, 2) has a Christian focus, and 3) is timeless, since *Forward in Christ* is planned months in advance

Teen authors can get started by visiting [www.wels.net/jump/whatever](http://www.wels.net/jump/whatever) and completing the submission form. Then they can submit their article online or print the form and mail it with the article to:

**"Whatever"**  
**Forward in Christ magazine**  
**2929 North Mayfair Road**  
**Milwaukee, WI 53222**

The article will be reviewed by the editorial staff. The teen author will be notified if the story is selected and receive a \$75 writer's fee upon publication. *Whatever* articles are also linked to the new LivingBold Web site.

## Have You Seen It?

WELS Youth Discipleship just unveiled its newly redesigned LivingBold Web site, which represents a concerted effort to incorporate what WELS teens said in surveys, focus groups, and larger discussions. The new LivingBold is more visual, more interactive, more timely, and more fun.

LivingBold is a vehicle for teens to connect with each other. Teens can now share their stories, watch video clips, participate in online chats, and more. Check out what's new on the site ([www.livingbold.net](http://www.livingbold.net)) and encourage your teens to participate. You can also encourage them to submit original work to the LivingBold Talent Gallery.

### Upcoming chats ([www.livingbold.net/chat](http://www.livingbold.net/chat)):

- November 27, 2007 – Why are adults so dumb?
- December 11, 2007 – Faith vs. Evolution
- January 22, 2008 – Summer mission trips

### New discussion topics ([www.livingbold.net/discuss](http://www.livingbold.net/discuss)):

- Why don't teens like "traditional" worship?
- What do you think of this site?

### Recent Talent Gallery additions

#### ([www.livingbold.net/welsspace/gallery](http://www.livingbold.net/welsspace/gallery)):

- Ministry in "the Gutter" (Articles)
- Hebrews 11 (Video)
- Through the Gates (Short Story)



# Keeping What You Expect and Accept in Context

by Pastor Caleb Schoeneck — Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, College Station, Texas

What is it about teens that makes you want to hug them at one moment and slug them the next? When working with teenagers you take the good with the bad. Let me say that another way: when working with teens you have to keep it all in context. Here's what one pastor said on the matter: "As long as youth groups remain within the bounds of Christian morals and good manners, it would be foolish to hinder their existence . . . The success of a youth group will be the better and more satisfying, the better the leader understands how not to step into the foreground, but as a hidden guide gives the young people instruction as to how they themselves should carry out the plans. This is a rare skill" (*Wauwautosa Theology, Vol. 1, p.72 - slightly paraphrased*).

Here's the point: the better you appreciate that a teenager is transitioning from adolescent to adult, the more satisfaction you will have working with them. Let me give you an example:

Last year our congregation had an evening VBS. We had 15 adults come every day after work to help out. But, it wasn't the best for reaching families in our community. Six children attended—all five member children and one non-member. It seemed that a daytime VBS might reach more people. We looked at our options but there were only three members available to help during the day. Then a friend called. He was hoping to find a service project for his teens before they would return home from the 2007 WELS International Youth Rally in Dallas. This was the perfect opportunity!

We decided to have a one-day, daytime VBS and use the rally teens to staff it. But first, we had to stop them from nodding off. You see, the teens had spent the last four days laughing out loud, late into the night at the "LOL: Laugh Out Loud" rally. When they arrived at my church, they were tired—too tired for any training. The next morning they all went to Bible study and worship. To the best of my

knowledge, no one pulled a Eutycus during the sermon, but after we all went out for lunch, the teens were just as sleepy as the day before. Training them now wouldn't do any good either.

We were running short on time. But, instead of rushing their training, we remembered that every night the teens got a second wind. So, we adjusted the schedule and had them do some mindless work in the afternoon. After that, we gave them their free time. Then, somewhere around 8:00 p.m., we began to study the lesson. By 11:00 p.m., not only had the teens learned the material for the next day, they even were asking unsolicited questions and wanting to spend more time on the lesson and the opening devotional skit.

It would have been easy for we adults to get frustrated at the teens for being so tired as a result of the Youth Rally. Instead, with a little extra patience,

an understanding of how teens work, and appreciation for the context, we were able to make the most of a difficult situation. We expected the teens to teach and help out. They did, as God's children always do. But, we also accepted the fact that they had an adolescent approach to an adult responsibility. In the end, we benefited from the work they accomplished, and the teens benefited by gaining invaluable experience. We just had to keep it all in context.

Without question the youth mission trip to our congregation was exceptional. Nothing was missing. But, there are three concluding thoughts I wouldn't want to leave you without:

- The youth group didn't come to learn how to run a day care but to teach little children that Jesus cares about them. The teens figured that out pretty quickly. Here's what Beka, one of the teens, said about helping with the VBS: "It was really cool to see all the kids that came and it was awesome that we as teens could help tell them about their Savior. It is great to know that teens have an important role in the church."

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## Resource Review

by Professor David Sellnow — Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota

**Reid, Alvin L. *Raising the Bar: Ministry to Youth in the New Millennium*. Grand Rapids MI: Kregel, 2004. 207 p. \$10.99. Available from NPH.**



*Raising the Bar* is rife with Baptist theology—which one would expect from Alvin Reid, a professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Reid will rub Lutheran readers the wrong way

when he cheers on the various holiness and revivalist movements that have occurred in the church—from Pietism in Germany to Methodism in England and the Great Awakening in the colonies, on down to the Jesus Movement in America in the 1970s. Nevertheless, an issue he lays before the 21st century church demands our attention.

Reid claims that his research reveals a common denominator across the lines of denominations: “Churches across America treat teenagers like fourth graders, and ministry to youth is like a YMCA/YWCA meeting.” He argues for aiming higher. “Young people can and do make mature, responsible decisions. But contemporary culture, even within the church, has developed a mistaken mindset: Youth are kids who need to be baby-sat, rather than young adults ready for the challenge of changing the world. Young people are not children finishing childhood; they’re young adults preparing for adulthood, and they will rise to the bar we set for them.” He likes what a 17-year-old said the church should

do for youth: “Tell them we know how to be teenagers. We want them to show us how to be adults.”

In urging churches to raise the bar for youth involvement in member ministry, Reid contends that the Bible speaks of children and adults with no separate category in between for “adolescents.” He calls to mind Bible examples of young people who did great things in the service of God (such as Samuel, David, Esther, Daniel, Mary).

Reid’s idea of youth ministry runs counter to the frequent norm. He poses the question to parents: “Do you think that youth ministry should primarily provide activities for your children? If so, please take a day off work and, instead, take your child to a theme park yourself.” “This generation of young people,” according to Reid, “is not satisfied with the latest game or icebreaker. They want real, honest, biblical substance.” Instead of activity-oriented youth programs, he favors fostering family ministry and including teenagers right alongside other “grown-ups” in the life and mission of the church. As part of this, he wants teens to be challenged to study doctrine deeply. “If they can learn chemistry in high school, they can learn theology at church.” The fact that doctrinal teaching differs between someone like Alvin Reid and those who teach in our churches only serves to reinforce the point for us further: For our upcoming adults to face the world, be bombarded by various teachings, and still stand in faith, we need a serious approach to youth ministry.

*Keeping What You Expect . . . continued from page 4*

- If we would have had six children attend VBS, we could have handled it with only three adults. But, when we changed our schedule to the daytime hours this year we had 21 children. This was the largest VBS in recent memory and only three of the children were members! What an understatement when Beka said that teens have an important role—without the teens, this would have been an impossible project for us!
- Maybe you have struggled finding the right balance between ministry and entertainment in your youth group. You may even feel like your efforts are unacceptable and not worth the effort. Maybe this will help . . . the pastor I quoted earlier was John Schaller. His words are taken from a textbook that he wrote for seminary students as

he instructed them how to work with teens. Here’s the kicker—he wrote that in 1913! Working with teens is not just appreciating the transition from adolescence to adult, it is also keeping Christ in the context as you watch these young Christians transition between the old self and the new self. They are struggling against sin and Satan, and so your struggle with them is not in vain.

*Pastor Caleb Schoeneck serves at Beautiful Savior in College Station, Texas, a WELS church with an average Sunday attendance of 41 adults and six children. Pastor Mark Luetzow from Trinity in Kaukauna, Wisconsin, extended the WELS Youth Rally in Dallas into a mini-mission trip for five teens from his youth group: Connor, Katie, Beka, Amanda, and Zach, and their chaperone, Amy.*

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## Life Success Follows Teen Chastity



A study released in the journal *Adolescent & Family Health* indicates that chastity during adolescence not only avoids teen pregnancy and fatherhood, it greatly affects a person's well-being in middle adulthood.

Men and women who were virgins at age 18 were interviewed 20 years later and the results show: these people had about half the risk of divorce, had completed more education, and had about 20 percent more income each year than those who were not virgins at age 18.

The study analyzed data from more than 7,000 men and women during the National Longitudinal Study of Youth from 1979-2000. [SOURCE: 5/5/05 - Agape-Press News Summary]

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

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