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Youth Supports

A resource to encourage and empower youth
leaders for the expansion of the Lord's kingdom.

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- **Z.E.S.S.T.!**
- **Youth Ministry Helps!**

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Z.E.S.S.T.!

Feeling left out? Having trouble making friends? Unsure of how to live out your faith in school? Feel like your school is full of cliques and you don't fit into any of them? Wish you could get to know your teachers better and have them know you as a person? Wish you could get to know other students better and have them know you as a person?

How many middle school students haven't had some or all of these feelings from time to time? School can be a tough place, especially at a time of life when having friends and being part of a group are more important than ever before.

Maybe changing schools is the answer. Perhaps it would help to go to a smaller school with smaller classes and less crowded halls and classrooms. Perhaps a Lutheran School would be the answer to many of these feelings and difficulties. Lutheran Schools are usually kind of small; making friends should be easier. Surely there are no cliques there. Lutheran School students are already Christians, so living out my faith should be easier there. That's the answer, go to a Lutheran School!

But what happens when you have these feelings and concerns and you're already attending a Lutheran School? Lutheran Schools can indeed be places where Middle School students can grow as Christian people, live their faith, and form close relationships with other students. However, these things don't just happen by themselves. Just because I attend a Lutheran School doesn't guarantee that I'll have tons of friends, never feel lonely, never feel like my teachers don't know me as a person, or that every student around me acts like a loving Christian all of the time. Lutheran schools are real-world schools with real, human people as teachers and students. Lutheran School students have the same needs and concerns as students in other schools. The Middle School students at Zion Lutheran School in Corvallis, Oregon said so - and their teachers listened.

Zion Lutheran School has 65 students in grades 6 - 8. These students come from all over the Corvallis area. They attend more than 20 different churches of different denominations. Most of them have attended Zion for several years, but a growing percentage transfer to Zion after the 5th grade and enter as new students in Middle School. These students told us that making friends in a class of 20 can be just as hard or even harder than making friends in a class of 500. They told us that the shift from single classroom elementary grades to Middle School with several teachers, different classrooms for different subjects, and different ways of studying can be hard in a Lutheran School too. When you're a new student, you can feel just as left out here as anywhere else.

What was the
best part
about school
that year?

"Z.E.S.S.T.!"

Youth
Ministry
Help!

From these conversations was born Zion Eighth, Seventh, and Sixth Together, better known to Zion as Z.E.S.S.T. Simply, Z.E.S.S.T. is like a big youth group made up of all Middle School Students at Zion. On the last Friday of each month the students gather for that month's Z.E.S.S.T. event. These events may be games (such as water balloon - sand volleyball. It is suggested that great care be taken when playing this game. Eighth grade teacher, Vince Straub nearly wound up in traction last time. One doesn't dodge as quickly after 50.), inspirational speakers (we heard a young man who is epileptic tell us about his life as an international bicycle racer. We got a chance to talk about faith overcoming seeming impossible obstacles.), and service projects (Z.E.S.S.T. teamed up with a former Zion student who was working on his Eagle Scout program to provide Christmas for five needy families in the Corvallis area. The students collected and delivered presents, trees, and food for each family.).

Z.E.S.S.T. kicks off each fall on the second day of school. That entire morning is spent playing games, talking with teachers and other students, Bible study, and refreshments (sounds a bit like a youth rally). As for each Friday event, the students are randomly grouped into teams of 8 - 10 students. Each team is composed of 6, 7, and 8th graders. Most activities are designed so that each team must work cooperatively for at least part of the activity. The emphasis is on getting to know each other, working together, and sharing faith activities together. The activities are mostly planned and led by the 6,7, and 8th grade teachers, school Principal, and parents. The leaders also take part in the activities and help the students get to know adults better as well.

Prior to fall parent conferences the first year of Z.E.S.S.T.'s existence, a parent asked her Middle School child what was the best part about school that year. Tiffany's answer was simply "Z.E.S.S.T." This past year's graduating eighth graders listed Z.E.S.S.T. as one of the most important new additions to Zion in their years in the school. We've learned that the desire for closer relationships, a sense of being part of something good, and faith growth through sharing is as important to Lutheran school students as any others. Youth ministry is an important component of Lutheran School education. We feel that Z.E.S.S.T. has made us a better school.

- [Jay N. Musfeldt](#), Principal, Zion Lutheran School, Corvallis, Oregon.

Find past issues of Youth Supports at:
<http://www.nowlcms.org/Youth/ysupportslist.html>

Youth Ministry Consultants in Your Area

Youth Ministry consultants help you to either fine tune your youth ministry, refresh it or get you started on a complete overhaul. Contact Dick Weniger at the district office at 503/288-8383 or email him at dickw@nowlcms.org for more information on how a Youth Ministry Consultant can help you and your congregation!

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