



A service of the
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Missouri Synod

Youth Supports

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

August 2004 - Volume 5, Issue 8

- Thinking Out Side the Box with Role Models
- Kaleidoscope - "It's Where You Belong!"

Thinking Out Side the Box with Role Models

Youth ministry teams should make it a goal to provide a diversity of role models in the flesh. Sure, we all cover the standard "material on role models" in the course of a year. It is a frequent and popular topic for school districts and athletic programs as well. Everyone recognizes teens are looking for someone to follow—someone they identify with, respect, and admire. It is a critical developmental milestone for adolescents and we know that. That's why so many churches will hire a young adult to work with the youth, isn't it? They hope the young adult can be all those things to all the youth, don't they?

Lutheran Bible studies on role models ask youth to identify their current role models and compare their choices with what the Bible says. Fine. But some youth just can't seem to figure out what that has to do with their real lives. Sure, some do figure it out—those who are more thoughtful, reflective, academic, religious, or perhaps older. Less mature ones seem to glean that they have a fearsome world of negative role models to avoid and God doesn't want them doing "bad things." Many youth feel disconnected from the adult world and don't have a clear sense of how adults could possibly help them.

This is part of a general problem we are experiencing today—generations are disconnected—and that runs counter to God's plan. God wants to use people who are older than ourselves to show us the way. God wants us to learn from people who have already gone through the life phases we are going through. This requires relationships in the flesh.

If you were going to change the way you teach "role models" this year, what would it look like?

If you've got parents and grandparents involved in youth ministry at your church, that's great. Keep up the good work! What about the rest of your congregation? What about that 30% plus who are over 65? This youth-ministry year will have an extra spark if you think outside the box. Begin by brainstorming, as a team which persons might be good to intentionally include in special activities.

For example, a few years ago I asked one of the older widows in our church, Joyce, to host a one-time teen Bible study in her home. Actually, it started as a smallish junior-high sleep-over in her backyard, but we wanted to come inside her house for the Bible study part. She was very reluctant, but I told her about the lack of good role models today. I explained that many of the junior-high youth don't know

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any people who do community service projects, like the one Joyce does. She was incredulous.

Joyce sews dolls for the children's ward at the hospital. She has a great story of how she got involved and what it means to her faith in Jesus. Well, that kind of approach really worked. I also reminded her of how teens like to look around other people's houses and hear about their lives. She then felt privileged to be asked and agreed to everything. Things went well and she has continued to offer her home for youth activities a few times each year. She always comments to me on how she is surprised at what the youth don't understand yet, or what she discovered to be interesting to them. Her life is enriched by the experience and the youth behave respectfully, listen quietly, and laugh at her stories. They appreciate her as a unique individual and some have shown interest in spending time helping her make dolls for the hospital project.

After 911 I asked a retired couple, who had lived for many years in the Middle East, to field general questions from the high school youth. Again, there was surprise on both sides of the age spectrum at this outside-of-the-box thinking, but it worked out very well. My experiences have taught me again and again not to be afraid to try things like this.

God's Word confirms it. Relationships are at the heart of all ministry. When an interesting Christian is placed into this mix we call youth ministry, there is the possibility we will see the Light.

— Amy Upchurch, Director of Christian Education at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Portland, Oregon <amy@princeofpeacelc.org>.

Find past issues of Youth Supports at:

http://www.nowlcms.org/educational_services/NetworkingMinistries/YouthSupports.aspx

E-Newsletter from Synod Board of Youth Ministry

The Board of Youth Ministry for the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has a monthly e-bulletin with youth ministry information. To subscribe to it, go to <http://www.lcms.org/enews/> and follow the directions.

Want Some Ideas for Your Youth Program?

The Board of Youth Ministry for the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod with a grant from Thrivent started a new electronic youth ministry resource available for free on the internet. Check out <www.youthsource.com/> The web page is not just for adults, but for youth too with a number of links to other great web sites. Pass it on to your own youth!

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