



A service of the
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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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- Growing Larger, Getting Smaller
- Youth Ministry Resources

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Growing Larger, Getting Smaller

When churches experience the good dilemma of growth, some may lament, "I hardly know anyone!" They wish they could keep the "home" atmosphere and still grow. Churches for years now have had a "small group" focus, but in most youth ministries we continue to minister to the whole group. So how do you overcome the feeling of a lost closeness and still continue to grow? How do you break the youth group attendance plateau of 20, 30 or even 40? It is by staying small in your approach.

We have learned ministering to our adult population. The solution is to focus on small groups. Chap Clark in his book, *Hurt*, affirms what parents have known for decades: the peer group becomes the most influential group for our teenagers. Youth ministry for years has devised ways to blend these peer groups, and some have had minimal success. Youth ministers have even given these peer groups labels like "cliques", and have devoted countless hours of programming to break apart these groups. The question is, why? Why have we taken these groups with all the intrigue and complex dynamics and try to blend them? It is like taking fully functional families and putting them under the same roof. Needs can easily go unmet. The emphasis needs to be placed on the small groups, rather than on the large group.

Noticing the natural peer groups, the youth minister can make connections with these peer groups, and begin to recruit adults who naturally fit with these groups. These are the peer groups of your students in their high school. Youth Ministers must develop, intentionally program, and select adults to meet these peer groups on their terms and on their turf. This means church buildings may not be the gathering place but maybe the local Starbucks or McDonalds will become the new gathering spots. Working within the peer group allows teens to maintain natural connections, existing within the peer group. Unchurched youth may not come to the church, but will come and meet friends and talk with adults from a church. It moves away from, "If you build it they will come" syndrome to a "sending disciples" approach of Mark 6:7.

The benefits of getting small will minister to the needs of the individual. Youth will feel they can bring their friends who enjoy a relaxed atmosphere rather than a formal church setting. When groups get large, small group principles suggest the

"I feel like I know you well."

group split to form another group working within the webs of friends and continue the growth patterns.

Is there still room for large group activities? Of course! But the shift in ministry is to focus on the small groups rather than the masses. Big groups can be a great place for deeper worship, service, and fellowship activities. We can bring these the small groups together and make connections across peer groups.

Being small helps develop the leadership of those in the group. Students can take ownership of the group meetings and feel a responsibility to make sure friends will be at the small group meetings. This is peer evangelism build into a small group setting. Youth workers can concentrate on leading the adults who work in this ministry. The move goes from the Youth Leader being sole instrumental to sharing the ministry with capable adults. The youth leader can serve not only a small group, but a group of adults broadening their sphere of influence. By staying smaller, youth leaders can reach more people and meet the intimate needs of teens while giving adults an opportunity to serve.

Small groups in youth ministry create a sense of "home" and soon you will hear students pronounce, "I feel like I know you well." Comments like these are an ingredient in youth ministries that grow, break attendance barriers and bring the Gospel to the peers of our youth members and in that way fulfill the Great Commission to "make disciples" (Matthew 28:18-20) in the world around them.

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Find past issues of Youth Supports at:

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

E-Newsletter
from Synod

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.

Ideas for Your
Youth
Program?

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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