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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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Refocusing Youth Ministry

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I used to think that the point of youth ministry was to get youth to the event or church so that they could get to know Jesus. Now I think that we just need to help them to know Jesus, and if they come to the event, then bonus! Certainly events can be used to help draw youth into the life and community of the church, but youth attendance at these events is not the end; it's not the main goal. Youth are swamped with stuff to do between school, homework, sports, family, and anything else! How will providing more activities help these young people to really get to know Jesus? The activity becomes just another competing tug in their already overbooked lives.

The YM 2007 conference that I got to attend this past January in Houston, TX addressed a very difficult and critical issue; the abandonment of adolescents by our society; individually and institutionally. The presenter, Chap Clark, showed us a photo of the first little league in the 1930s and explained that it was started to teach kids (boys and girls) how to play America's past-time and how to have fun. What has it turned in to? We now have the Little League World Series! Whom does this serve?

There is evidence in our society that what kids and youth do and how well they do it reflects on their parents' image. This is why a father might get rather upset when his son doesn't play the game well. It is about the parents' reputation and the child may be inadvertently taught that his value is based on his performance. Our society is moving in a direction that coaches, especially paid coaches, are more concerned about the team's stats than the teaching of character and sportsmanship. The church is not above guilt particularly when it comes to youth workers. The pressure is on to compete with everyone else. A frequently asked question: "how many kids do you have in your youth group?" What about the relationship these young people have with their Savior?

A DCE at my table said that people who work with kids are more concerned about performance reviews (their own agenda) than on care for the kids. I believe that this is more and more likely in our society. In November of 2005 I began to attend school lunches because I wanted to find out for myself where students are at from within their environment. I only wanted to bring myself; no expectations, no event publicity, and no agenda. In doing that I discovered that it is possible and necessary to connect with youth outside of youth events.

Whenever a young person attends worship, approach them, look them in the eyes, say, "Hi!" and ask them a few questions.

K-Scope on Hood Canal!

At YM 2007 we were equipped with some simple tips for what we as a church can do to be there for youth. Become the student of the student. What are they involved in? Meet them where they are at. Show up at the band concert or the sporting event to show your interest. Find out where they work and go order a soft drink just to say "Hi." Perhaps they simply need someone to be Jesus.

Whenever a young person attends worship, approach them, look them in the eye, say "Hi" and ask them a few questions. Remember their name and follow up in weeks to come. These young people will go home knowing that they belong. There is the old saying that, "They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Chap Clark suggests that taking the time to send a youth a post card that conveys, "we care about you" will help the youth to see that you care.

I believe that youth events are still important and significant. I believe that they are a piece of youth ministry that helps the youth connect with each other and develop lasting relationships and memories in a Christ-centered environment. I also believe that as congregations and individuals we need to work really hard to connect with and care about individual youth, even when it means going out of our comfort zones.

Here are some online resources that might be useful:

www.cyfm.net
www.ParenTeen.com

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Find past issues of Youth Supports at:

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

"Kaleidoscope," one of the premier youth ministry programs of the Northwest District, is set for July 8-13, 2007. Arranged by the the Youth Ministry Task Force of the district, this creative and dynamic experience of the Christ community will be held at the Christ Lutheran Retreat Center near Belfair, Washington. The registration fee is \$150. Congregations are encouraged to offer scholarship assistance for their high school youth. Because of the nature of the program, only 35 participants will be included — and no more than four from one congregation. Youth currently in high school are encouraged to apply by June 11 (postmark). After this date registrations will be accepted on a "first come, first served" basis. Jeff Kranich, DCE at Hope/Seattle, will serve as the dean. Pastor John Schmidt (Prince of Peace/Tacoma) serves as the K-Scope Coordinator and will be the "pastor-in-residence." Registration opens March 1. Contact Pastor John Schmidt for more information at 253-584-2565 or KscopeNOW@cs.com

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