

# thESource *Resource Kit*

## Let's Lead - Volunteers

*by Bill Ameiss*

Not all volunteers are created equal.

"I'd really like to, but you see, my schedule..."

"I'll bring refreshments to the next meeting, but I couldn't possibly go on that retreat!"

Think of all the different tasks involved in youth ministry in your congregation. Not all Christians have the same gifts and talents. Not all people have the same amount of time to spend serving. But, if you expect all of your youth volunteers to have the same responsibilities, perhaps you are asking them to be the Jack, or Jill, of all trades that they do not feel confident to be!

Dividing youth volunteer tasks into more specific job descriptions can help your ministry by involving more adults. Volunteers can find the job which fits their schedule, talents, and comfort level rather than agreeing to serve but feeling overwhelmed or turning down the opportunity to serve because the task is not understood.

The questions below are a tool to use as a survey to check the interest and commitment levels of potential volunteers. Each job description begins with questions for the potential volunteer to consider. These are followed by a role which would fit that interest level. You may wish to ask your recruits to read this article directly, or you may want to ask these questions in your recruitment effort. However, in all your efforts, begin with prayer, seeking God's guidance in the volunteer selection.

Leaders are people first!

If you're considering any one of these roles, ask yourself these questions:

1. Do I care deeply about Christian faith and its impact on people?
2. Do I like young people of junior high and/or high school age?
3. Do I enjoy being around them, spending time with them, and listening to them?
4. Can I be caring with different kinds of young people from different backgrounds, or with differing values?
5. Can I enjoy young people, yet be willing to be the adult man or woman, with leadership responsibility that I need as a youth leader?

If you can answer "YES" or "PRETTY SURE" (or even "FOR THE MOST PART") to these questions then you could enjoy working with young people. You would probably enjoy being a Chaperon.

**Chaperons** are adults who go along on youth outings, events, trips, etc. They might be involved in a one-day event such as a picnic, an area youth rally, or a progressive dinner, etc. Most chaperon roles are best seen as participants with young people, support people for the event, not just observers or bystanders. Some youth outings are more than one day events, such as a weekend retreat, a district youth event, an extended travel trip, or even a five day event like the synod-wide National Youth Gathering held every three years. Preparation for the event with all the adult leaders involved and the young people becomes very important. The youth director and/or pastor will help everyone going (short or long) think through what the event is all about, and what each person needs to do to make it worthwhile (including the chaperon)!

Another role you could consider is that of **driver**. It's really a variation on the chaperon theme, but with very special responsibilities. Drivers carry the responsibility for safe transportation from "Traveling dinners" to "Youth Gatherings". Safe transportation is no small concern. Most congregations find it best to supply drivers over age 21, rather than use members of the youth group who have their license.

Still another role you might enjoy would be that of **Parish Parent**. Parish parents are adults (a couple or two singles) who are assigned to young people at confirmation. They send them birthday cards, baptism birthday cards, as well as Christmas and Easter greetings. They say "Hello" to them and visit briefly with young people when they meet at church. Some parish parents take the young person out on their birthdays. Usually assigned to a youth by the pastor or youth director for the four years of high school, parish parents are a wonderful reminder that the whole congregation cares about each young person.

One more role in youth ministry is **Youth Prayer Partner**. Youth and adults in the congregation are assigned to each other to hold each other up in prayer. They have the opportunity to pray specifically for the needs, concerns, joys, and opportunities of each. It's a unique way congregation members can care for each other.

Ask some additional questions:

6. Do I feel comfortable being open and honest with young people in discussions of sensitive and controversial issues?
7. Do I enjoy seeing young people grow, develop insights into life and faith, and learn to apply that faith to real life?
8. Am I able to share myself and my faith with young people in the midst of their learning and growing?
9. Would I be willing to develop some skills in working with groups of young people?
10. Would I be interested in growing in an understanding of adolescent growth and development?

If you answer "YES" to most of these questions (again a "FOR THE MOST PART" will do), you would probably enjoy working as a youth counselor or youth advisor.

**Youth Counselors** (or youth advisors) work directly with young people. They assist teens (and in many cases a youth board) in planning for youth ministry in the congregation. They are concerned with the personal growth and development of young people. They have an opportunity to be an example to young people. In addition, they work together with the youth board (and/or youth committee), the youth director, and/or the pastor to involve young people in the total life of the congregation.

Just a few more additional questions:

11. Would you like to be an advocate for youth needs and concerns in the congregation?
12. Do you enjoy working as a planning team with both youth and adults?
13. Can you commit to two to three years of work on such a youth planning team or board?

If the answers are "YES," or even "FOR THE MOST PART," then you might ask to be considered as a candidate for your congregation's youth board (or youth planning team).

**Youth Board** (or planning team) members share the final responsibility of the congregation's youth ministry effort. They are often responsible for selecting counselors (or youth sponsors). They administer the youth portion of the congregational budget. They serve as resources and support to the entire youth ministry effort in the congregation. They are a vital key in the congregation's ministry to young people.

Blessings as you serve!

Certainly people who have not spent time with teenagers in recent times may be a bit apprehensive about working with the church youth group. Encourage them to start as a chaperon or driver, perhaps. When they experience the joys of youth ministry they may decide to move up in their level of commitment.

In all of our work with youth, we must remember this: we are not just serving young people, or for that matter, the congregation. We serve the Savior in all that we do for and as His people. Be assured He will guide, direct, and support you as you consider serving Him by serving His young people.

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