



LOVE
YOUR
NEIGH
BOUR

Congregations have...

OPPORTUNITIES
TO SERVE
AND LEAD

Congregations have...

OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE AND LEAD

From the Rite of Confirmation, youth are considered adult members of the congregational community. As such, they can be expected to take on roles of service and leadership. Each youth has God-given skills, experience and abilities which can uniquely help the church or community. In living out their vocation, youth can make a meaningful impact on the congregation and community. Many teens are also capable of excellent leadership, where those skills, experience, and abilities are used to impact how people and resources are directed to reach common goals. In fact, LCMS Youth Ministry research showed congregations with at least one leader under 32 had better rates of retention in the LCMS than those that did not.

LCMS Youth Ministry Research showed 94% of Millennials, including those who had disconnected from the church, said it was important for a congregation to be involved in community service. Young people are watching the Church and looking for the love of Christ to overflow to their neighbors. It doesn't happen overnight. Giving youth opportunities to serve and lead takes time and effort. Parents and other supportive adults should work together to identify how God has uniquely gifted each teen through long-term relationship. Once those gifts and skills are identified, teens are encouraged to develop them for use in service, leadership and vocation inside and outside the church. It may also mean new opportunities need to be formed. No matter how these opportunities are made available, congregations can discover and celebrate a youth's giftedness.

Whether in service or leadership, youth can quickly identify when the role they are taking lacks any significance or impact. Healthy youth ministry invests in a variety of ways for youth to make meaningful contributions to their congregation. Meaningful contributions can include inviting their input into important congregational decisions or listening to their feedback after a service opportunity. Providing a meaningful contribution does not necessarily mean placing them in leadership positions. Instead it means actively listening to what they say and respecting the unique perspective and gifts teens can offer.

Some youth will be ready for contributions beyond a meaningful impact into load-bearing leadership. Load-bearing leadership means they have roles that include decision making and can direct people and resources. Congregational leaders should mentor youth who are prepared to take on extra responsibility. Young leaders need to be coached, encouraged, and debriefed every step of the way. Established leaders have experience, knowledge of systems and a critical understanding of history. They can help support young leaders and pave the way for their success. When a young leader fails, they need to be able to offer forgiveness, grace, and new opportunities to try again. If the church believes that everyone has a vocation in the Church, their household and community, leadership should reflect the diversity of ages in the congregation.

Youth ministry is a key place for service opportunities and for new leaders to be developed. While teens should serve as a part of and with the larger congregation, age-specific service opportunities provide opportunities for targeted learning and building relationships. In the same way, youth should be considered for leadership opportunities in the larger congregation, but youth ministry is a key place where God can use their leadership in powerful ways. Leadership of peers can be especially impactful on both the leader and on the youth in your ministry.

Opportunities to serve and lead can be stretching for youth as they develop and learn new skills. The congregation should be an environment of warmth, challenge, and grace for them as they grow. As they succeed and fail along this path, they can be reminded that all is done because of Jesus' love for us and through the work of the Holy Spirit. ■