

7 Practices of Healthy Youth Ministry: AN INTRODUCTION



THERE HAVE BEEN MANY MODELS FOR YOUTH MINISTRY in the LCMS throughout the years. From Confirmation instruction, Sunday School, Walther League to Lutheran Youth Fellowship and beyond, congregations have served their young people in a variety of ways at different times. As Generation Z passes through our youth ministries, congregations may feel unprepared to face the unique gifts and challenges of working with teens today.

LCMS Youth Ministry has spent significant time in the last few years listening, reading data, conducting research and digging into Scripture around what is key for healthy congregational youth ministry. Our heart is to faithfully lead, serve, resource and network youth and adults by working through LCMS districts and congregations with Christ at the center of everything. We provide resources to help congregations make disciples for life by encouraging quality, Christ-centered youth ministry.

Whether you are a parent, pastor, commissioned minister, church staff, or volunteer, we hope you find the material helpful. While the practices described here may not cover every facet of ministry or teaching of this church, we do hope it provides support, direction, and inspiration. **Before you dive into this material, we want to highlight a few things you won't see in our Seven Practices of Healthy Youth Ministry.**

This is not a program. We will not present you with a curriculum, schedule, or plan of events. There is no single right path to produce healthy youth ministry. Instead, the focus is on relationships: God's relationship with us, parents' relationships with their children, the congregational relationship to youth, and the youth's relationship with key adults. We believe that when you seek to build and sustain Christ-centered relationships, the right programs for your congregation will become clear.

This is not a short-term fix. Transitions and culture shifts take time. There will be trial and error along the way. Do not be disheartened when your work doesn't immediately result in teens flocking to your ministry in droves, or when

you receive push back against new ideas. Trust that God will work in and through you over time to help young people live out their faith from baptism into adulthood.

This is not about you. It can be easy to believe that youth ministry succeeds or fails on the work of parents, pastors, commissioned ministers, church staff or volunteers. This simply isn't the case. It is God who is at work in and through each of us as we live out our daily vocations, including serving the youth of our congregation. It is God who works through the Word and Sacrament giving forgiveness and new life. We will sin, fail and fall short. Yet despite this, God will work His will and way in us and in our youth. Take heart this responsibility is in the hands of the Holy Spirit.

This is what we hope you will see.

This is about Jesus. Youth ministry is nothing but loud games and banging dodge balls if it isn't rooted deeply in the love of Jesus Christ. From community building to Bible study, the cross and empty tomb should be at the center of everything we do. Healthy youth ministry should seek to point youth leaders, parents, and teens back to the love of Jesus and the forgiveness we receive through His death and resurrection.

This is possible for any congregation. The number of teens, location, resources does not qualify or disqualify any congregation from healthy youth ministry. The devil discourages ministry by focusing our attention on limitations. Yet, congregations with two or three teens or few resources do some of the most amazing youth ministry.

Vibrant, healthy youth ministry can be found in suburbs and in rural areas. We have done our best to present practices that can be translated for any congregational setting. It will look different for each congregation. Your task is to find what these practices look like in your unique context.

This task is worth it. God has called these youth into His family through baptism. Our ministry with and for them can have a lasting impact today and for eternity. When you are a part of youth ministry, you are doing something extremely valuable for the church and for your teens. Thank you for dedicating your time, heart, and energy to the care of today's youth.

C.F.W. Walther (the first LCMS President) once said, "You cannot use your time to better advantage than by serving well the young people of the congregation." If you are taking the time to read this material, we hope you believe Walther's sentiment as well. It can be easy to be overwhelmed and perhaps even wonder why healthy youth ministry is important at all. It is easy to forget the

whys of ministry after time, repetition or busyness has set in. We ask ourselves "Why build long term relationship with teens? Why do we value youth, and all ages, being active together in congregational worship? Why mentor young leaders? Why is Christian fellowship and education important for all ages?"

Take time to remind yourself and others why healthy youth ministry (or healthy ministry for any age) is important. Reminding long-time members and explaining it to the young or new members can infuse and reinforce church culture. A congregation's ministry values should be communicated regularly and reinforced with actions. When a congregation prioritizes youth ministry, youth will be able to both hear and see their value and place in the congregation.

May God bless you richly as you serve the youth of your congregation. LCMS Youth Ministry is praying for you and desires to serve you as you build healthy congregational youth ministry.

7 Practices of Healthy Youth Ministry

HEALTHY CONGREGATIONS HAVE...

- Warmth, Challenge and Grace
- Supportive Adults
- Engaged Parents
- Opportunities to Serve and Lead

HEALTHY CONGREGATIONS HELP EACH YOUNG PERSON...

- Deeply Understand their Baptismal Faith
- Develop a Resilient Identity in Christ
- Live out their unique vocation