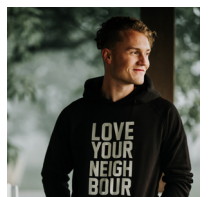
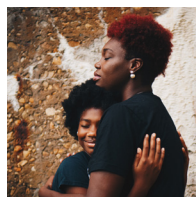




7

# PRACTICES of HEALTHY YOUTH MINISTRY





# 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

# 7 PRACTICES of Healthy Youth Ministry

**LCMS YOUTH MINISTRY HAS SPENT SIGNIFICANT TIME** in the past five to 10 years listening, reading data, conducting research and digging into Scripture to find out what is key for healthy congregational youth ministry. Unsurprisingly, our conclusions continually centered around relationships: God's relationship with us, parents' relationships with their children, congregations' relationship to their youth,

and the youth's relationship with key adults. Whether you are a parent, pastor, commissioned minister, church staff member or volunteer, we hope you find this material helpful. While the practices described here may not cover every facet of ministry or teaching in your church's context, we do hope it provides support, direction and inspiration for you and for any congregation.

## Congregations help each young person...

### Deeply Understand Their Baptismal Faith

- Youth live as forgiven sinners with the promise of eternal life through Jesus' death and resurrection.
- Youth recognize the work of the Holy Spirit who brought them to faith, gathers them into God's family and works through them.
- Youth regularly worship, study the living and active Word of God, pray together and receive the Lord's Supper.
- Youth are provided with deliberate age-specific opportunities to move toward key outcomes for young Lutheran Christians. (Examples are outlined in Youth Ministry Teaching End Goals.)



### Develop a Resilient Identity in Christ

- Resilient youth identify with the life and mission of the Christian church and seek to serve others.
- Resilient youth remain humbly confident in their faith in the face of crisis and transition.
- Resilient youth can build relationships with those different than themselves and navigate disagreements in a humble, loving way.
- Resilient youth are lifelong learners who face doubt and challenge by turning to God's Word.



### Live Out Their Unique Vocation

- Youth understand their role as Christ's hands and feet in their church, home, community and other areas of vocation.
- Youth reach out to their neighbor in word and deed to love and share the Good News of Jesus.
- Youth serve and lead in their congregation and community.
- Youth seek to be warm, challenging and grace-filled to their community and peers.
- Youth are encouraged to pursue church work vocations as it fits their gifts and skills.



# Congregations have...

## Warmth, Challenge and Grace

- Congregations foster an open and honest environment where youth share joys, questions, crisis and doubt, knowing God's Word will be spoken in love.
- Congregations share personal stories of grace, failure, challenge and joy.
- Congregations are willing to engage in tough spiritual conversations.
- Congregations have a dedicated, developmentally appropriate space for youth where they grow as disciples with their peers.



## Supportive Adults

- Supportive congregations seek to connect every youth with at least five engaged Christian adults.
- Supportive adults deliberately invest and value long-term, intergenerational relationships.
- Supportive adults prepare for and respond to celebration, transitions and crisis.
- Supportive congregations seek have adults who champion young people and dedicate time and energy to developing teens as disciples of Jesus Christ for life.



## Engaged Parents

- Engaged parents prioritize faith development by encouraging daily faith practices especially during times of transition.
- Engaged parents invest in the lives of their children by understanding their child's vocation and the culture around them.
- Engaged parents participate in worship, personal spiritual practices and service.
- Supportive congregations provide parents encouragement and support from other Christian adults.



## Opportunities to Serve and Lead

- Congregations identify gifts and skills in youth that can be used in service, leadership and vocation inside and outside the church.
- Congregations invest in youth by providing consistent opportunities for meaningful contributions.
- Congregations engage and support youth in service inside the congregation, in the community and beyond.
- Congregations empower young people to be load-bearing leaders by providing training, mentors and space to learn.



# Congregations Have Warmth, Challenge and Grace



- Congregations foster an open and honest environment where youth share joys, questions, crisis, and doubt knowing God's Word will be spoken in love.
- Congregations share personal stories of grace, failure, challenge, and joy.
- Congregations are willing to engage in tough spiritual conversations.
- Congregations have a dedicated, developmentally Appropriate space for youth where they grow as disciples with their peers.

**WHAT WORDS WOULD YOU USE** to describe your congregation? How would your youth describe it? Every congregation has their own history, norms, practices, and community that all impact the congregational environment. When we ask this question of youth leaders, we do see commonalities with words like supportive, welcoming and friendly.

The environment or culture of a congregation and particularly of a youth ministry may seem nebulous, hard to describe or to change. Yet, God works in and through people and relationships to develop critical factors for faithful growth in God's Word. Healthy congregations have an environment which builds trust, fosters Christ-like relationships and helps weather the storm of teenage and young adult years. In contrast, an unhealthy culture can create animosity, frustration, hurt and make it easier for young people to walk away.

**We use three key words to describe an environment for healthy youth ministry: warmth, challenge and grace.**

Warmth is characterized by displaying Christ's love for all people and a personal invitation to be a part of the community of believers. Every guest and regular attendee should be welcomed generously to worship and ministry programming and given what they need to focus on God's gifts for them. All Baptized members are consistently reminded and shown they are an important part of the body of Christ. Warmth is a welcome invitation to be with the family of God where we receive God's forgiveness and love, sharing it freely with others.

Warmth is shown when people across generations are known and what to know others. This warmth in a congregation allows for an open and honest environment where youth share joys, questions, crisis, and doubt knowing God's Word will be spoken in love. No congregation or individual can do this perfectly, yet we strive to see and reflect God's love for us to others.

Challenge has two different aspects to it. First, challenge is being willing to engage in tough spiritual conversations. Standing firmly in God's Word, it faces the questions and confusion youth experience living in our current culture. Adults use good listening but don't just let sin and conflict slide. Challenge means respecting young people as they become independent and treating their questions seriously. The Holy Spirit working in the congregation can reflect the love of Jesus, pointing always to the cross as young people navigate joy and struggle.

The second aspect of challenge is focused on encouragement of young leaders to live out their faith. Adults should use opportunities to challenge young disciples to actively engage in vocations, service and leadership through the work of the Holy Spirit. Challenge doesn't underestimate young people. Instead it gives them opportunities to grow, even if there is potential for failure.

Grace in our relationships and culture echoes God's love and forgiveness to us. As youth struggle, grow and change, they need parents and supportive adults to constantly remind them of their chief identity as God's beloved Baptized child. Words of confession and absolution should be spoken often, and congregations should

regularly share personal stories of grace, failure, challenge and joy. As young people struggle, they need a community of believers who support, share their narratives and point young people back to the cross, reminding them of the God who sent His Son for us all.

One way to foster an environment of warmth, challenge, and grace is to have a dedicated space for youth where they grow as disciples with their peers. While healthy youth ministry is integrated into the larger congregation, there is a need for space, time and resources specifically

for young people. This allows adults to teach at a developmentally appropriate level and focus on the unique needs and questions of teens.

There is no prescription or program for creating a healthy environment. The work of creating this environment of warmth, challenge and grace cannot be rushed or superficial. **Congregational communities can be a teen's testing ground for seeing if God's love described in His Word is effectively applied and active in real life.** A healthy congregational environment is key to healthy youth ministry.

## Discussion Questions

### FOR YOUTH LEADERS

- How have you personally experienced warmth, challenge and grace in your life?
- What words would you use to describe your congregation?
- How can you help create an environment of warmth, challenge and grace?

### FOR YOUTH MINISTRY TEAMS

- Would you say your youth ministry is a safe place for young people to struggle? If so, why? If not, what changes can you help create that environment?
- How can we as youth leaders appropriately share stories of failure, grace, challenge, and joy?
- How do you prepare parents, adult leaders and teens to be comfortable dealing with hard questions?

### FOR CONGREGATIONAL LEADERSHIP


- How do you practically work towards making your congregation an environment of warmth, challenge and grace?
- Consider how you welcome visitors, the physical building, and communication for places to start.
- What outlets do you have for adults and teens to share personal stories of failure, grace, challenge and joy?
- What resources are you putting towards a dedicated space and opportunities for youth?



# BIBLE STUDY:

# Beyond Community

BY REV. BRIAN WEAVER

Download a printable PDF of this study at [YouthESource.com](http://YouthESource.com). 

*This study is written to be used with older middle school-aged youth, or high school youth. It is an in-depth look at some of the foundational pieces of Christian community, whether that is a youth's group of friends, or the congregation's youth group, or even the general concept of the community of believers. Each of the parts of this study has been designed so that the whole study can be done within a one-hour time frame. However, they can certainly be expanded or shortened if necessary. Items that are in "italics" are notes for those leading the study.*

**Supplies:** pens or pencils, Bibles, 4x6 inch index cards, plain scratch paper.



## **Hook:** 10–15 minutes

*This section of the study time is designed to introduce the topic and get the group to begin thinking in the general direction of the topic—community.*

**Game:** If you have the time, and the space (and the courage), try to play a game of Red Rover, Red Rover. To play, break the group up into two teams. Both teams form a line, shoulder to shoulder with their arms linked and each side facing the other. One team begins by saying, “Red Rover, Red Rover, let \_\_\_\_\_ come over.” That person then is to run and try to break through the line. If they succeed, they get to take a player of their choice back to their team. If they are unsuccessful, they stay with that team.

## **OR**

### **Discussion:**

- How long have you been friends with your friends? Do you remember the first time you hung out? If so, what did you do?

- Why is it important that you have your friends to hang out with? What do you appreciate the most about your friends?
- Have your friends ever helped you out in a tough situation? Have you helped your friends out in a tough situation?
- What do you think it takes for friends to stay together through high school, college, or even into being an adult?
  - Of those things, what do you think is the most important and why?
- How would you define the word community? Is there a difference between “community” and “friends”?

### **Book:** 20–25 minutes

Look up the following passages and as a group/individual, and try to figure out what these passages say concerning “community”

**1 Corinthians 13:** *Paul’s famous discourse on love — which is found ultimately in Christ Jesus alone.*

**Galatians 6:1–5:** *speaks to humility and service to others out of love for one another as the vocation of all believers*

**Galatians 5:13–15:** *we are called to love and serve one another, as followers of Christ*

**1 John 1:5–10:** *as we turn to our Savior for forgiveness, we can turn to each other and forgive. This is how we are called in Christ to handle conflict with each other. See also Matthew 18 below.*

**Luke 22:24–30:** *humility and respect are essential in any relationship, but especially in a community/group of friends.*

**Matthew 5:1–12:** *the attitudes and behaviors of a Jesus follower, but for a purpose — see next Scriptural reference.*

**Matthew 5:13–16:** *how to conduct yourself in such a way that your life reflects the good news of Jesus Christ.*

**Matthew 18:15–20:** *Jesus’ response to how we are to handle conflict between each other when it arises.*

**John 15:1–17:** *Jesus’ answer to how we live our life of faith in Him- by abiding (dwelling in Him, and how He reveals Himself to us in His Word).*

**Acts 1:6–8:** *Jesus’ final words to His disciples before His ascension according to Luke. Speaks directly to our calling as His community of believers. Similar to Matthew 28:16–20.*

**Acts 2:42:** *Many consider these four acts of the early Church to be essential to Christian community.*

**Colossians 1:9–14:** *It is vitally important that we pray for one another continually. This is just one example of how the Apostle Paul prayed for the churches, the communities of people, that he had served and continued to minister to through letters.*

### **Look:** 15–20 minutes

*Use the following discussion questions to help tie together the Scripture passages above with what it means to be in Christian community. You can also have the groups that went through the Scripture passages together also answer the following the discussion questions.*

- What do these passages say concerning the idea of community, but especially what it means to be a community of believers in Jesus Christ?
- As you think about your group of friends, or our youth group, or even our congregation, what of these pieces of Christian community are you/we doing? What are you/we not doing?
- How is this different than how we typically think about “community” in our culture today?

### **Took:** 10–15 minutes

*The activities in this section are designed to bring application to the discussion in a way that gets the youth thinking beyond Bible study, as well as opens up opportunity for further discussion.*

- Write out, on your scratch piece of paper, two things from today’s Bible study that you want to start doing with your friends to help you come closer together.
- On an index card write out three things you’d like to see us do as a youth group/ congregation that you think will help build deeper community.
- As a group, close this time in prayer and lift up the very things the youth shared on their index card for your youth group/congregation. Allow the youth themselves to lift up their individual ideas in prayer.

# Congregations Have Supportive Adults



- Supportive congregations seek to connect every youth with at least 5 engaged Christian adults.
- Supportive adults deliberately invest and value long-term, inter-generational relationships.
- Supportive adults prepare for and respond to celebration, transitions and crisis.
- Supportive congregations have adults who champion young people and dedicate time and energy to developing teens as disciples of Jesus Christ for life.

**IN BAPTISM GOD BRINGS** a young person into His family full of supportive adults of many generations. While parents or guardians may be the most critical person in a youth's faith life, other supportive adults can play a significant role in walking alongside youth in their faith development. **72% of active LCMS Millennials said they had a safe person to talk to at church compared to 35% of those now unaffiliated with any church.**

Maybe you can think back to adults in your life who listened to you, prayed for you, and cheered you on. Hopefully you can remember supportive adults in your life who made a lasting impact, and you want to be that same kind of adult for other young people.

Congregations should seek to connect every youth with at least 5 engaged Christian adults. These adults should regularly check in, provide a listening ear, and develop mutual trust with a young person. They should model and encourage faithful worship, Bible study, and prayer. Supportive adults show consistent, genuine interest and find ways to celebrate and encourage them. All this helps each young person to feel seen and known by an adult who has their best interest at heart.

**The role of supportive adult doesn't need to be complex or time consuming.** Any number of adults can serve as supportive adults including parents and guardians, extended family, church workers, and older members of the congregation. Their connection to young people can come from deliberate program or develop organically. It is simple to gauge how many adults a young person is

connected to by simply asking who they would feel safe turning to if they had a question, doubt or crisis.

Congregations should find ways to deliberately invest and value long-term, inter-generational relationships. Adults can have a meaningful impact on teen during a short season. However, long-term relationships are uniquely equipped to engage and re-engage youth during transition and crisis. These adults provide stability and a safe place for speaking Law and Gospel at appropriate times. There is great benefit when congregations systematically connect adults with the right capacity to help maintain quality relationships over time.

Supportive adults prepare for and respond to celebration, transitions and crisis. This means knowing a young person closely enough to anticipate transition, spot rising issues and engage them at critical moments. Being present at these key times helps young people to know these adults desire God's best for them. Knowing resources, encouraging timely conversations, a keep communication open can be powerful tools that God uses to keep youth in the community of faith. Through the Holy Spirit, these adults can pray for young people, provide mentorship and continue to show up in whatever way that young person needs.

Supportive congregations have adults who champion young people and dedicate time and energy to developing teens as disciples of Jesus Christ for life. These are special adults who are passionate about caring for the young people in your congregation and are willing to

advocate for them. These youth leaders dedicate their time and energy to ensuring young people are have the place and space to grow as disciples for life.

As youth seek to better understand who God is and what God has done from them in Jesus Christ, they do not

need to walk alone. **God has blessed youth with many adults who can share their experiences, help support their faith practices and encourage them to stay faithful.** The investment in each youth by faithful Christian adults is powerful for congregations and youth ministry.

## Discussion Questions

### FOR YOUTH LEADERS

- How have you seen the impact of longevity or the lack of it in your ministries?
- List what children, youth and young adults you are actively supporting in your congregation.
- What transitions or challenges might they be facing soon?
- How are you praying for them?

### FOR YOUTH MINISTRY TEAMS

- How are supportive adults investing in teens during transitional times? How can we plan to specifically care for young people in those times?
- How is your youth ministry encouraging long-term relationships, rather than short term ones?
- How are you engaging and connecting older adults?
- How are you keeping supportive adults engaged as students come in and out of youth ministry?

### FOR CONGREGATIONAL LEADERSHIP

- How are you systematically surrounding young people with other faithful Christians who can build real, mutually respectful relationships with them?
- How is your congregation investing (training, resourcing, etc.) in adults who work with young people?
- What supports or limits longevity for leaders in your congregation?
- How can your congregation help create inter-generational connections that engage more supportive adults?



# Raising Adults who Champion Teens

BY BRANDON METCALF, DCE

**A QUICK SEARCH FOR THE PHRASE “RAISING KIDS WHO...”** results in all kinds of books, resources, and training about how to raise children in a certain way. The secret sauce (other than BBQ sauce, which always helps too) behind all these various resources is the truth that a parent, teacher, or coach can intentionally work to foster certain kinds of behaviors, attitudes, or beliefs within a child.

Let me illustrate this by giving a bad example. I’m thinking about writing a book called “Raising Kids Who Can Juggle.” Page one will say, “Hope your kids have innate skill.... otherwise you’re wasting your time. Not that juggling really matters.” Page two would say, “Find some swords, sharpen them up, have your child throw them in the air, and see what happens!” Pages three through two hundred and twenty would have the heading “NOTES”, and then have blank space for writing. The author biographical information on the back cover would reveal that I myself can’t juggle. I’m sure I could make ~~thousands~~...fives of dollars with that book.

What’s wrong with that book? A whole lot of things, but for the sake of simplicity, let’s narrow it down to four important principles:

- 1. You need to believe that it’s important. This seems obvious, but you need to show that it’s relevant and that it matters first before you do anything else.**
- 2. You need to believe people can learn and grow in this area, regardless of ability level.**
- 3. You don’t start with an advanced step (much less one that’s extremely unsafe like juggling swords). You want to develop the skill or attitude from a basic step and work your way up.**
- 4. This needs to be something you model yourself. Not that you’re perfect at it, but that you have some experience. It’s easier to follow an example than just a set of directions.**

This example teaches us some principles that we can apply to other areas, like how we raise not only kids, but also adults. The idea of raising adults is similar to kids, though there’s much less literature on it. I think that’s exactly what’s needed when it comes to having adults in your ministry and congregation who are champions for your youth.

First, we’ll go through the principles of raising up adults in this way, an example of what that looks like, and then share some practical ways that it can be done.

## Principles of Raising Adults Who Champion Teens

### **1. You need to believe that it’s important.**

The first truth that you have to hold on to is that raising adults who champion teens is actually important. Vital, in fact. Young people need adults who are rooting for them, cheering them on, and helping to activate them in service and ministry. I think back on the people in my teenage years that had the biggest impact on me and a common theme for all those influential adults is that they believed in me and they let me know that. I’m sure the same is true for you too. There’s a reason why having supportive adults is one of the Seven Practices of Healthy Youth Ministry- they’re essential.

### **2. You need to believe that adults can learn and grow in this area, regardless of ability.**

Once we understand that this is important, how do we find the right people? This is where it’s important to recognize that we’re talking about “raising” adults, not just finding people who are already good at this. This is crucial, because if it’s just something you either have or don’t

have, you will be very limited in who will be championing the young people in your congregation, if anyone is doing it at all.

This is something that everyone can learn, developing the gifts that God has given them. Whether you're an "up front" person or "behind the scenes", there are ways that any adult can learn to be a champion for teens. An official title is not needed either, and in fact sometimes it's better that way. People expect the "youth leader" to champion the youth, but when other members who don't have official positions begin to act in the same way, the youth leader's voice and influence is multiplied.

**3. You don't start with an advanced step. You want to develop the skill or attitude from a basic step and work your way up.**

Don't throw someone into the role of "youth board chairperson" without first letting them get to know the youth and the ministry that you're doing with them. Note that I said ministry "with" youth, not ministry "to" youth. Therein lies a crucial distinction. If you're going to champion youth, you need to see them as partners in ministry rather than recipients of it. That's an example of a basic step, or attitude change, that works someone towards being a champion of youth- that they advocate for ministry with youth, not just to them.

**4. This needs to be something you model yourself. Not that you're perfect at it, but that you have some experience.**

It's easier to follow an example than just a set of directions. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." Don't just raise others to champion youth, do it yourself. Identify others who are good at one aspect or another of being a champion for youth and lift them up as an example too.

## What Does an Adult Who Champions Teens Look Like?

If we're to raise adults who champion teens, we need to know what we're trying to raise or build towards. What are the outcomes or goals that we're wanting to develop? Here's an example of what these outcomes could be, though there are certainly more in each area:

An adult who champions teens is someone who...

- Values young people as vital members of the church of God today
- Believes ministry is meant to be *with* teens not just "to" or "for" them.
- Feels called to champion youth because youth can do meaningful ministry

- Has skills in encouraging and supporting teen leadership
- Understands that teens need opportunities to serve in ways more than just babysitting or stacking chairs, but that they have individual gifts that need to be developed and encouraged
- Regularly asks the question, "What am I doing that I could either do with some youth or that I could train them to do themselves?"
- Prays for youth individually and specifically

## Practical Steps for Raising Adults Who Champion Teens

Now that we've talked about the principles (what is this) and the outcomes (what does this look like), let's dive into some practical steps (how can we accomplish this). These are just a few ideas, but hopefully they will spark even more ideas that are specific to your context:

### INVOLVE YOUR BOARD/COMMITTEES.

This is not just something that the youth leaders do but should be congregation-wide. Involve the other board or committees or other groups, depending on how your church is structured, in the process. **Coach each board to identify 1 way that they can do ministry *with* youth in the next calendar year.** For example, your Board of Missions is challenged to find a way that they can involve young people in their efforts, so they decide to partner with your women's group and the youth ministry. Perhaps they are doing on a "freezer meal" ministry where your women's group works with the teenagers to prepare freezer meals that can be grabbed by anyone in the congregation to give to someone in need (after a surgery, death of a loved one, adoption of a child, etc.). The teens could be involved in this by actually helping with the cooking, picking the recipes, and maybe even doing some deliveries of meals afterwards.

How did this great intergenerational opportunity come about? Instead of the women's group or missions board doing the event on their own, someone decided to champion teens and say, "Our youth can serve in this way! Let's partner with them!" When each group begins to think this way, there will quickly be a plethora of places to connect your youth in service and ministry because I firmly believe that once people ask the question once a year, they'll begin to ask that question all the time: "How can we involve the youth in this ministry?"

# Congregations Have Engaged Parents



- Engaged parents prioritize faith development by encouraging daily faith practices especially during times of transition.
- Engaged parents invest in the lives of their children by understanding their child's vocation and the culture around them.
- Engaged parents participate in worship, personal spiritual practices, and service.
- Supportive congregations provide parents encouragement and support from other Christian adults.

**HEALTHY YOUTH MINISTRY EXTENDS** past the congregation into the home and back. Parents are gifted with the role of primary instructor and example for their children in the Christian faith. In LCMS Youth Ministry's research, nearly 3-in-4 Millennials listed a parent as one of the most influential people in their faith lives. Parents and guardians are critical, but they don't do it alone. Congregations can come beside parents equipping them with tools and support in their vocation.

Not every family looks the same, nor does every family have two faithful Christian parents. **While we talk about parents, we know guardians, step-parents, extended family and other adults may have the same impact. We know God can work in and through any person who takes on this critical role in a young person's life.** Congregations should be prepared to support and engage families in whatever form they take.

Engaged parents prioritize faith development by encouraging daily faith practices especially during times of transition. Today's busy families are constantly forced to make difficult decisions to prioritize their schedule and resources. Congregational ministry can take an adversarial role against other activities, or it can work alongside parents to support faithfully setting priorities and fostering faith growth wherever they are. By teaching Christ-centered priorities in the home, young people learn to set similar priorities during life's transitions as they grow and become independent.

Engaged parents invest in the lives of their children by understanding their child's vocation and the culture around them. Engaged parents do not need to be cultural experts, but they should understand the influences on their child's life. From sports to phone apps, parents and guardians should know how their young people are spending their time and the messages they are hearing. Parents can connect with their children around things that give them joy and should be active listeners and learners around their child's interests and gifts.

**LCMS Youth Ministry research found that today's active LCMS young adults were more likely than those who had left the LCMS to report having a good relationship with parents where they could discuss questions of life and faith.**

Parents and guardians walk alongside young people as they live out their vocations and as their lives and roles change. At each stage of life, they can guide their child as God develops life-long disciples.

Engaged parents participate in worship, personal spiritual practices, and service, even after their children have become adults. LCMS Youth Ministry's research found today's active LCMS young adults likely saw and continue to see today a high level of faith practiced by their parents. **Whether parent, guardian, grandparent or other family structure, youth will tend to emulate worship and congregational involvement of adults in their lives.**

Congregations have a role in encouraging and supporting all parents and guardians to actively engage in their children's faith lives. Parents and guardians can find support from older adults and other parents who are also Christ-centered. Congregations can provide training and communication to parents as they seek to raise faithful youth. Knowing how powerful the example can be, congregations can assist parents in attending worship, Bible

study, and even making opportunities to serve and lead accessible.

Deuteronomy 6:7–8 says “You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” Healthy youth ministry embraces scripture, and points to parents as a critical component in the faith lives of young people.

## Discussion Questions

### FOR YOUTH LEADERS

- How do you help support parent(s) in their vocation as primary faith teacher?
- How have you seen parents have an impact on the faith lives of youth?
- Do you know parents/guardians/other family who may need extra support and encouragement? How can you help them in their vocation?

### FOR YOUTH MINISTRY TEAMS

- Does your youth ministry communicate to parents that they are the primary instructor and example for their children?
- How does your youth ministry help train and empower adults to have faith conversations, including questions and doubts, at home?
- How does your youth ministry train parents to understand their child's vocation?

### FOR CONGREGATIONAL LEADERSHIP

- How does your congregation impress on parents the importance of their own faith life, worship, and leadership on their children?
- How does your congregation help parents understand the spiritual, mental, and emotional development of their child through different ages and life circumstances?



# Full House and Faith Conversations

BY BLAKE BROCKMAN, DCE

**I WAS BORN IN 1995**, so while I was not alive when it aired originally, I was a big fan of the show Full House. In the summer months my older sister, brother, and I would spend time with my grandparents – and on rainy days if the Cubs or Braves weren't on, we watched Full House on ABC Family.

One of the biggest tropes in Full House was the heart-to-heart: a moment in almost every episode where either Danny (the dad) or Uncles Joey & Jesse would sit down with one of the kids to resolve conflict or talk things out.

Unfortunately like most things on T.V., this is an idealized way of life. There are certainly times where heart-to-hearts happen in the classic Bob Saget style, but they probably don't happen daily, weekly, or even monthly. What is even more unfortunate is that when it comes to having heart-to-hearts about our faith & what God tells us in times of conflict, doubt, and more we often drop the ball.

Research continues to show that parents are the most important mentor and leader in a child's faith. Not their pastor, DCE, or youth leader. Conversations about faith, doubts, God working through all things, and more are more impactful when it is from a parent than from a church worker.

That doesn't mean that pastors, DCEs, or youth leaders aren't important in the faith lives of young people. It just means that they aren't the first person a child looks to for an example. Often our programs are designed with this lens, which leads us to difficult questions.

If you're a pastor, DCE, or congregation leader, are you equipping parents to be that most important person? To be that example? Or are you trying to fill that void – a void that isn't yours to fill?



If you're a parent, grandparent, or guardian, are you taking necessary steps to talk to your children about God, what His Word says, etc.? Are you taking the time to listen to your child's fears & concerns and then pointing them back to Christ?

Those are hard questions to ask! You might not like the answers. Sharing the faith, answering & asking questions, and passing on the faith – It's a TOUGH task.

Joshua and his generation, after saying that their houses would serve the Lord, didn't pass on their faith to their children & grandchildren. Judges 2:10 tells us of the next generation and that they did not know God. Their struggle with doing a noble, but tough task of sharing their faith leads Israel to need Judges to get them out of trouble.

Sharing our faith is scary, uncomfortable, and awkward at times. Letting kids know that we have failed, that we have struggled, that we don't know the answers, is hard. Taking the time to educate ourselves in God's Word, Lutheran theology and how to understand in the context of our lives is difficult and takes time. Thankfully God has showed us time and time again, and ultimately on the cross, that scary, uncomfortable, and awkward tasks are often worth it.

Where might we start?

First, transition some of your traditionally youth focused programs to better equip the whole family.

In my context, we have tweaked some classic programs to be more about families than children. Our confirmation program has more parent involvement. They work through readings and questions with their confirmands. The confirmand then comes to class and goes through the same readings and questions with pastor and I. We made the switch 3 years ago and have already seen & heard from families about how it has impacted them. One parent let me know that they often look for extra ways to apply what they're going through in Confirmation to their life that week.

Second, equip parents with tools to carry what they see and hear at church into the rest of the week. Due to the pandemic we have been able to think outside the box. We're moving away from traditional Sunday School, instead moving to online programming for the whole family. It is geared for children and includes discussion questions to do through the week. We are also developing a video podcast to go over topics & subjects parents may struggle to talk to their kids about that will also provide them with questions to discuss with each other & their children.

If what we are doing in my context isn't something that would work in yours – that is okay! Think of ways you can get information in the hands of parents! Communicate with parents about what topics you are covering in youth ministry. If you can, provide them with discussion questions for at home & encourage them with resources.

Finally, if you are a parent, grandparent, or guardian reading this, know your role is important but God will equip you for this task. One big obstacle for many in having faith conversations is the fear of failure.

My wife and I use the phrase “Progress is Progress” when encouraging each other. For example: “Did you work out today?” “No, but I did go on a nice long walk.” “Oh, nice! Progress is Progress.”

You might not feel successful when you share your faith with your child for the first time. It might feel awkward. You might feel you are stumbling over your words too much. You might think that you aren't speaking coherently. Our gift of faith in Jesus and this gift given to our young people in Baptism is the most important thing we can share, even when it's difficult.

God will speak through you as you share with your child. Progress is progress. Look for key opportunities like upcoming times of transition. There might even be instances where faith conversations happen naturally! This could be when they are heartbroken, disappointed, scared, angry at a friend, grieving, overjoyed, have sinned, and so much more.

You can build on progress as you go, in adding time in God's Word and prayer together. LCMS research found that when parents build on spiritual practices like prayer and Bible study and faith conversations in the home the impact in retaining young people in the faith is multiplied, not just added, with each one. Progress isn't always a straight line as life shifts. It won't just happen; it will take time. We will fall short and need forgiveness. It takes practice and being willing to step into having that awkward conversation or moment to start.

God put parents first in the faith development order in Deut. 6. That hasn't changed over the last 4000ish years. Jesus was taken to the Temple by Mary & Joseph. With His help, you can do it. God designed the vocation of parenthood to help pass along saving faith is Jesus.

Study after study shows us that youth who have parents that talk about faith issues, and churches that help foster that relationship, are more likely to value their faith into adulthood. When it comes to faith conversations, whether you're a parent, church leader, or church worker – you can do it. Pull up a seat, sit down on the edge of the bed like Bob Saget, and remember: God is with you (Matthew 28:20), and He is NEVER against you (Romans 8:31).

# Congregations Have Opportunities to Serve and Lead



- Congregations identify gifts and skills in youth that can be used in service, leadership and vocation inside and outside the church.
- Congregations invest in youth by providing consistent opportunities for meaningful contributions.
- Congregations engage and support youth in service inside the congregation, in the community and beyond.
- Congregations empower young people to be load bearing leaders by providing training, mentors, and space to learn.

**FROM THE RITE OF CONFIRMATION**, youth are adult members of the congregation and as such can be expected to take on roles of service and leadership. In living out their vocation in these ways, youth can feel a sense of ownership and can positively impact their congregation and community. **LCMS Youth Ministry's research showed congregations with at least one leader under 32 had better rates of retention than those who did not.**

Congregations should start with identifying a teen's passions, gifts and skills. God has uniquely created each teen. It's important to find the right role for them in service and leadership either inside and outside the church. Supportive adults and parents can help identify where the youth may excel then direct them to appropriate existing opportunities or even design new ones for them to fill.

Healthy youth ministry invests in a variety of ways for youth to make meaningful contributions to their congregation. Meaningful contributions are opportunities to give input into important decisions and provide feedback on ministry experiences, goals and direction. This active engagement respects the unique perspective and insight gifts teen offers. All young people can give meaningful contributions if the congregational leadership seeks out opportunities to listen well.

Congregations should engage and support youth in service inside the congregation, in the community and beyond. Service is any way we use the skills, gifts, and abilities of young people. 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 neighbor. **Gen Z is a generation of action and they value service as a way for God to use them to show mercy and point to the Gospel.**

Congregations empower young people to be load bearing leaders by providing training, mentors, and space to learn. Load bearing leadership uses skills and abilities in roles that include decision making, responsibility and the ability to direct people, goals and resources. Not every young person is a good fit for leadership. Choose and mentor leaders carefully making sure they are deeply rooted in their Baptismal Identity and have the time to dedicate to leadership.

Fostering young leaders takes time and effort. They need to be coached, encouraged, and debriefed every step of the way. Whether in service or leadership, youth can quickly identify when the role they are taking lacks any significance or impact. When a young leader fails, they need to be able to offer forgiveness, grace and new opportunities to try again.

**Leadership should reflect the diversity of ages in the congregation.** 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. Young leaders bring energy to your congregational leadership. They can also serve as good examples for other young people and direct ministry towards ways to connect with their peers.

Opportunities to give meaningful input, serve and lead can be stretching experiences for youth as they develop and learn new skills. It is beneficial both for the young person and congregation. 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.

## Discussion Questions

### FOR YOUTH LEADERS

- Think of the youth you know well. What skills and gifts do they have that can be used for service and leadership?
- Where can you help teens to have a meaningful contribution to ministry?
- How can you encourage both experienced and young leadership to work together?

### FOR YOUTH MINISTRY TEAMS

- Where can teens have meaningful contributions to youth ministry?
- What service opportunities do you provide for youth? How can you grow these opportunities?
- Who might you lift into leadership in youth ministry? Who can mentor them along the way?


### FOR CONGREGATIONAL LEADERSHIP

- How does your congregation empower and mentor young leaders?
- What might prevent your congregation from engaging young leaders?
- Who are current leaders in your church who might be good at mentoring a young leader?



# Young Leadership Matters

BY JULIANNA SHULTS, DCE

Download a printable PDF of this study at [YouthESource.com](https://YouthESource.com). 

**MILLENNIALS HAVE TAKEN A BIT OF A BEATING** in our pop culture over the last few years. As they moved through their 20s and 30s, Millennials have been mocked, joked about, and criticized. Articles come out each month with some industry Millennials have “killed.” Their food choices are blamed for their financial difficulties. Boomers and Xers have shared publicly and privately their concerns over Millennials’ professional and leadership shortfalls. Millennials are entitled. They received too many participation trophies and don’t know how to work hard. They don’t know how to communicate well face-to-face. Millennials are selfish and aren’t invested in institutions.

The reality is that Millennials are different, but neither better nor worse, than generations before them. Every young adult sitting in your pew is different and cannot be boiled down to a stereotype. They are sinful humans trying to navigate a broken world in need of redemption from Jesus Christ.

Our world is changing at a tremendous rate. As a result, Millennials and Generation Z who follow them will challenge the Church as they move into leadership. God has gifted this generation as He has every generation with the tools to share the Gospel.

Our Congregational Survey asked the age of the church’s youngest leader and what role that leader has. We chose this question to echo one from our earlier research. We polled the Young Adult Volunteers at the 2016 LCMS Youth Gathering. 91.6% of Young Adult Volunteers at the Gathering say they feel equipped to serve their congregations. 25% of those YAVS report having a leadership role of any kind in their congregation.

Of the congregations who responded, 57% reported their youngest leader was under 32. This age proved to be an important threshold for retention. Congregations with a leader under 30 years old showed increased retention compared to those with only older leaders. Churches with a leader under 30 report a higher rate of young adults retained in their home congregation. They also show a lower rate of young adults leaving before graduation. Having a leader under 30 increased the number of young adults who are still worshipping in the LCMS, even if they

have moved congregations. The first line of the chart below shows these impacts are not influenced by congregations simply having more young adults overall.

Truly, the impact is about empowering young leaders.

The leadership roles described were not exclusively staff or board members. Some were youth leaders, Sunday school teachers, and even ushers. The positive effect of young leadership in retention is also seen in other research. Barna’s research found that 45% of Millennials active in the church agreed, “I learned to view my gifts and passions as a part of God’s calling.” Only 17% of Millennials now inactive in the church agreed. In *Growing Young*, Fuller Youth Institute reports that growing, healthy churches can be characterized by empowering young people into leadership roles.

The importance of lifting young adults into leadership reminds us of the importance of vocation. Vocation gives us a critical understanding of how God uses us as His hands and feet in the world. Congregations should get a refresher course in vocation often. It is too easy to see our gifts, abilities and time as our own, and not as a part of God’s work in the world. Vocation is a calling for every age. With a right understanding of vocation, young leaders become an important part of serving God and each other.

Finding and empowering young leaders isn’t simple. Many of our congregations don’t have young adults actively worshipping. Perhaps the first step is to search for those

young people who have walked away and reach out to new young adults. As you do, it may be tempting to immediately engage them in leadership. Before you raise up young leaders, ensure they are well grounded in their faith, attached to the vine that is Jesus Christ. If they aren't regularly in worship and personal faith practices, take the time to encourage that growth before you lift them into leadership roles.

Existing church leaders can struggle to put aside their own ego or agenda to empower new leaders. Instead, young leaders are engaged in poor-fitting, powerless or token positions. Young adults can spot this a mile away. Asking them into leadership only to be decoration can lead them to avoid leadership in the future. Experienced leaders can be nervous and undercut young leaders. They hand off then take back responsibility. When experienced leaders anticipate failure rather than success, the young leader knows they are not trusted and will quickly walk away.

Millennials can be the source of struggle as well. They are chronically over-prepared and under-utilized. Many are strapped with student debt and struggling to find success in the marketplace. They may pass on church leadership to prioritize work. They may turn down a leadership role they feel isn't important. We may see similar struggles with Generation Z. A recent study by Barna said that Gen Z identifies professional and academic achievement as most important to their sense of self. At its root, these generations feel immense pressure and often feel they aren't using their gifts and abilities like they could or should. The church and leadership within it can help form an identity in Christ that helps to right this distorted sense of disappointment and self-justification.

Millennials and Gen Z are less likely to show institutional affiliation. Rather, they are looking for a sense of authentic community and purpose to their service. Teens and young adults are likely to ask why a certain program or ministry is important. If they can't get an answer, they are unlikely to feel invested. Empowering young leaders may mean being open to challenging questions and new ideas. It also may mean redefining success together so that the church can share the Gospel in new ways. Young leaders can bring new energy and excitement to a ministry, but only if they can bring their unique thoughts and gifts.

Young leaders need mentorship and guidance, but done right, this can connect them into even deeper relationships and community. They do not need to be micromanaged, but they do need a listening ear and a safe space to learn. Make sure to debrief young leaders, especially after big responsibilities are done. It doesn't have to be formal or time consuming. New, young leaders need to have someone talk through the experience with them. Part of this debriefing will mean being honest about your leadership experience, both good and bad. They need to

hear that you messed up a time or two before and lived to tell the tale. They also need to see confession and absolution practiced by you and other leadership when things go wrong. Unlike competitive academic and professional settings, young leaders should find the church is a safe place to lead, fail, and find forgiveness and redemption.

When I talk to high school students and young adults about leading in the church, I remind them to be patient with the process. Church structure, both written and unwritten, can be difficult to navigate. It can suck the enthusiasm out of the most seasoned leader. If they must be patient, you must be willing to help forge the way forward to keep leaders moving. Have their back when people struggle with new ideas and changes they propose. Give encouragement when they try something new and even when they fail.

For those who have empowered and supported young leaders, be encouraged. This action alone has a significant impact on the Kingdom of God. Not only does it use the gifts and skills of that leader, it helps children and teens have a vision for how they can serve in the near future. Embracing young leaders helps a congregation to stay vibrant and healthy. It has meaningful impact for the church today and tomorrow.

## Discussion Questions

- What is the average age of your congregation? Of your pastor(s) and church staff? Of your lay leaders?
- What is the age of the youngest church member in a leadership role? What is being or could be done to involve more young adults in congregational leadership?
- What concerns do you have about young adults serving in leadership in your congregation?
- What is something your congregation is not doing in ministry that a young adult might have the gifts, skills, or knowledge to make it happen?
- Who in your congregation would make a good leadership mentor for young adults?
- To what extent are adults currently serving in leadership open to young adults partnering with them in leadership roles?
- In what way(s) is your congregation equipping youth to form an identity in Christ that helps them develop skills to cope with disappointment and to have a proper view of success? What is being done to help them develop their identity in Christ?

# Help Each Young Person Deeply Understand Their Baptismal Faith



- Youth live as forgiven sinners with the promise of eternal life through Jesus' death and resurrection.
- Youth recognize the work of the Holy Spirit who brought them to faith, gathers them into God's family, and works through them.
- Youth regularly worship, study the living and active Word of God, pray together, and receive the Lord's Supper.
- Youth are provided with deliberate age specific opportunities to move toward key outcomes for young Lutheran Christians. (Examples are outlined in Youth Ministry Teaching End Goals.)

**HELPING YOUTH TO DEEPLY UNDERSTAND** their baptismal faith may seem simple, but it's far from easy. In Baptism, young people are given forgiveness of sins, new life and eternal life. A deep understanding of their baptismal faith is far more than a onetime event. It is central for a lifelong discipleship as teens experience new learning, expanding freedom, struggle and doubt.

A healthy youth ministry centers around young people as forgiven sinners with the promise of eternal life through Jesus' death and resurrection. It is the deep foundation for youth to apply God's Word to the ever-increasing complex baptized life. For youth in these times of new learning, expanding freedom, struggle and doubt, what can never be lost is the ultimate importance of Jesus' death and resurrection. It provides them a place of confidence, resting in God's Baptismal promises which are theirs for a lifetime.

Youth should recognize the work of the Holy Spirit who brought them to faith, gathers them into God's family, and works through them. **Each youth's baptismal identity makes them different than the world around them, light and salt in the world.** While this identity as a Child of God can be a challenge in our culture, it is also a great comfort and joy. They do not go alone. Through the gift of faith, they are gathered into a community around the cross of Jesus.

The work of the Holy Spirit gives them what they need to stand strong and share the Gospel with those around them.

Their ability to share their baptismal faith is critical as Generation Z has more Nones (those who do not ascribe to any religious belief) than any generation. The teen years are critical to the retention of young people in the church and faith. Engagement in the wider congregation and age specific youth ministry are both ways the Holy Spirit works throughout a young person's life.

Youth should regularly worship, study the living and active Word of God, pray together, and receive the Lord's Supper. While youth specific ministry is beneficial, all young people should be encouraged to be in God's Word and Sacrament given in worship. Young people will struggle with sin, guilt and self-justification. It is through God's good gifts to us that we receive and deeply understand our forgiveness through Jesus' death and resurrection.

**Healthy youth ministry instills in youth the desire to understand and study God's living Word.** Scripture is not just another source of information but the source of God's living Word to us. Technology provides many with instant access to information, ads, and data from the moment they wake up until they go to sleep. Youth need a lens through which to process and understand all the

information given to them. Amongst all the voices and information, parents and the church can train young people to listen to Jesus' voice above all the chatter.

Youth are provided with deliberate age specific opportunities to move toward key outcomes for young Lutheran Christians. Every youth ministry can seek to send their teens out equipped with vital practices, skills, and knowledge given through the Holy Spirit. We can see these outlined in the 40 Teaching End Goals. These End Goals are designed to move youth from Confirmation towards a deep understanding of their faith which will guide them as lifelong disciples. While they are not comprehensive,

nor do they seek to limit what youth should learn in youth ministry, they are helpful goals for youth ministry practitioners and parents to consider.

In the 30+ years of LYF Poll data, the number of responses of "I Don't Know" has increased tremendously on key issues. Young people are facing challenges to the Baptismal faith in ways different than previous generations. Every youth ministry can seek to send their teens out equipped with vital practices, skills, and knowledge given through the Holy Spirit. **Deeply understanding their Baptismal faith is deep foundation for youth in their every-increasing complexities of life.**

## Discussion Questions

### FOR YOUTH LEADERS

- How can you model regular Scripture reading, worship, and prayer for teens in your life?
- How can you help remind teens of their baptismal identity?

### FOR YOUTH MINISTRY TEAMS

- How does your youth ministry build on what is taught in the Confirmation process?
- How does youth ministry empower teens to be self-directed learners and resource teens to bring faith into everyday life?
- Look at the Youth Ministry Teaching End Goals. Which of these areas do you teach well? What could use additional focus?

### FOR CONGREGATIONAL LEADERSHIP

- Does your congregation have a comprehensive educational plan and goals for young people from Baptism to graduation from high school? How often do you review such a plan?
- Do you resource parents and other youth ministry leaders to communicate God's truths to young people? Do you train parents and others to access additional resources when immediate answers to questions may be unknown?
- How does your congregation record a teen's worship attendance? How do you follow up with teens and their families who haven't been in worship?





# 40 END GOALS AT HOME DISCUSSION GUIDE

**TEACHING END GOALS** are 40 statements we pray teens know and personalize by the time they graduate from high school. They aren't the whole of scripture or Lutheran theology, but they are critical pieces of understanding our Baptismal faith. We pray young people here these key tenants in worship, Bible study, youth ministry but most especially in their home. Families can be powering places to teach and apply these Biblical truths in young people.

Below is a guide to discuss each of the 40 Teaching End Goals with your teen. Here are a few things to keep in mind.

- You aren't doing this alone. Be sure to center discussions in Scripture. Use the Lutheran Study Bible (if you have one), the catechism and trusted digital resources like [youthsource.com](http://youthsource.com) and [lcms.org](http://lcms.org). Reach out to your pastor, church workers, and other supportive adults as you need.
- These are meant to be back and forth conversations, don't dominate or teach at them. Instead, listen well and ask good follow up questions.
- There is a good chance that your teen will have difficult questions or respond differently than you might expect. Treat those moments with warmth, challenge and grace. Keep the conversation going rather than shut it down.
- Be willing to be vulnerable. As it's appropriate, share your questions and tell your personal stories of failure, grace and joy.
- There is no "right way" to have faith conversations in your home. We know that young people who are active in the LCMS today reported higher levels of being able to have difficult conversations of life and faith in their home than those that left the church. Just trying it can be a step forward in helping your young person better understand their baptismal faith and develop resiliency in their identity in Christ.

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**HAVE EVERYONE SHARE A HIGH** (celebration) and a low (disappointment) and something surprising for that day.

Read one of the 40 Teaching End Goal Statements and the scripture (where provided) that follows.

## Discuss the following questions:

- What does this tell us about God? about ourselves? About our Christian community? About our world?
- When is a time you understood this in a different way or more clearly?
- In what ways have you or do you struggle with this?

- Where else in God's Word do we hear something similar? Does this remind you of any Bible stories? Of any part of the catechism?
- Where does this remind us of our sin? Remind us of the good news of Jesus?
- How can God's truth here impact how we make choices and live day to day?

Discuss prayer request you might have for that day. Pray together.

**TEACHING END GOALS** are 40 statements we pray teens know and personalize by the time they graduate from high school. As youth ministry teaches from Scripture and the Catechism teens will better understand these key tenants of their Baptismal faith.

**Youth will be affirmed in their **IDENTITY** as a loved Child of God. Through the hearing and study of God's Word, youth will know...**

- My Heavenly Father wonderfully created me. (Psalm 139:14)
- I have fallen short of the perfection God desires and understand the temporal and eternal consequences of those sins. (Romans 5:12; Romans 6:23a)
- Jesus Christ loves me and has redeemed me by His atoning sacrifice on the cross. This is the Good News, the Gospel, of Jesus Christ. ( John 3:16; I John 4:10)
- Jesus calls me to faith and is with me daily as I live in baptismal grace. (Matthew 28:19–20; Galatians 3:27)
- Christ feeds and sustains me with His gifts—Word and Sacrament—of which I am an active recipient for a lifetime.
- In Christ, I am a new creation. (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- In Christ, I am both a citizen of heaven and of earth. I trust Jesus that He alone gives me life to the full in the here and now. ( John 3:16; Philippians 3:20; John 10:10)
- I am simultaneously sinner and saint (a new creation), asking for repentance and resting in Christ's grace, forgiveness of sins, and promises. I am strengthened in my walk with Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit. (Psalm 51)
- I was not created for myself, but for others. I am called to act justly and serve my neighbor, to love and show mercy, and to walk humbly with my God. (Micah 6:8)
- God has redeemed and gifted me to care for those around me.

**Youth will deepen their understanding of the critical importance of Christian **COMMUNITY** inside their families, individual church communities, and in the worldwide church. Through the hearing and study of God's Word, youth will know...**

- God desires to bless me with family, friends and community. (Proverbs 6:20, Colossians 3:20, Ephesians 6:1–3)
- Through my baptism, God gathers me into His body/ community, the Church. (Ephesians 4:4–6; John 1:12–13)

- Christ gathers and strengthens my local church community, and the Christian Church throughout the world through Word and Sacrament. With this community, I gladly hear God's Word preached and taught. (Act 2:42–47; I Corinthians 11:17– 34; Hebrews 10:25; Luke 10:16)
- Christ unites my church community in love, and we are strengthened to live in His love. (Colossians 3:12–17)
- Christian communities, especially families, are places I can receive and practice forgiveness. (Mark 11:25; Matthew 6:12; 2 Corinthians 5:16–21; Colossians 3:13)
- My Christian faith connects me to God's chosen people over time and space—the joys, challenges, sufferings, and celebrations. At the Lord's Supper, I join with “angels, archangels, and all the company of Heaven”. Together, we worship and give praise to Jesus Christ, the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. (Revelation 5; Hebrews 12:1–2)
- The Church embraces and values the diversity of ethnicity, language, and culture God has created in His community. (Galatians 3:28–29)
- I do not have to face trials or questions alone but ask Christ for humility to ask others for help and prayer. (Galatians 6:2)

**Youth will better understand how to have **HUMBLE CONFIDENCE** in themselves and in God. Through the hearing and study of God's Word, youth will know...**

- By the power of the Holy Spirit, I confidently confess my Christian faith personally and in every area of my life.
- Jesus Christ is THE “way, truth, and life” for life now and the life to come. (John 14:6)
- Sanctification by the Holy Spirit is a lifelong process through Christ's Holy Word and Sacraments.
- I can boldly go before God in prayer in my times of need, celebration, and joy. I pray about sinful temptations and ask for the Holy Spirit to protect me from them. (Matthew 6:8–14; I John 5:13–15; John 17:15; Mark 11:24; Psalm 17:6; Psalm 145:18; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 4:2)
- Out of love for my neighbor, I strive to be a witness of Christ in word and deed. (Matthew 4:19; Matthew 5:16; Romans 1:16; 1 Peter 3:15; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:25–37)
- This fallen world will bring struggles with, “rulers, authorities, cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”. (Ephesians 6:12)

- When faced with troubles, I boldly trust in God's mercy and cling to His promises. (Psalm 5)
- At times, it will seem the world or "culture" may have victory, but I will trust in the truth of God's Word and His desire for me. (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 6:12; John 1:9–13; I John 1:5–10)
- This fallen world will bring tough topics and issues. God's Holy Word gives me answers and responses to these topics. I may at times struggle with these answers, but God's Word and promises are enough.
- Every Christian will not have every answer. I may not always agree with other Christians. Using answers found in God's Word, I will listen with patience, engage in humble discourse, and engage with them (parents, pastors, church workers, other adults, peers, etc.).

**Youth will grow in the understanding and living out of their VOCATION. Through the hearing and study of God's Word, youth will know...**

- God places me in multiple roles (vocations) in life where I share God's goodness and love (student, child, athlete, friend, employee, part of the body of Christ, etc.).
- Motivated by the love of God in Christ, I serve my neighbor to the best of my ability and put their interests first. (Mark 12:31–34; Philippians 2:1–4)
- As a Christian, I love and respect all people and work as a steward of God's creation. (Genesis 1:28; Mark 16:15)
- I rely on God to give me "daily bread" and strive to be good stewards of these gifts. (Matthew 6:11)
- I show respect and honor to people in vocations which have authority over me and/or serve me (parents, teachers, police, pastors, church workers, etc.). (1 Timothy 2:1–2; Hebrews 13:17; Ephesians 6:1–3; Colossians 3:20)

- As a young person, I prepare for future vocations (citizen, employee/employer, spouse, parent, etc.), and strive to understand how I serve my world through these vocations.
- I will prayerfully consider opportunities to serve the church in roles such as pastor, teacher, directors of Christian education, deaconess and other church work careers.

**As a reflection of Christ's love, youth will learn and live out ACTS OF SERVICE AND MISSION to the world. Through the hearing and study of God's Word, youth will know...**

- I can support the mission of the church (locally and broadly) through the gifts of my time, talents, prayers and financial support. (Philippians 1:4–5; Acts 12:5)
- I can pray for the mission of God's people to serve their neighbor outside of their regular vocation (medical missionaries, servant events, mission trips, mercy work of the Church, etc.).
- I will prayerfully consider serving outside my regular vocations when opportunities provide themselves.
- I trust the Holy Spirit to give me words to share my faith with others when opportunities become available. (Matthew 4:19; Matthew 5:16; Romans 1:16; 1 Peter 3:15; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:25–37)
- Where God's Word clearly teaches, I will stand for justice and fair treatment in matters of life at all stages and help, serve, and protect the life and well-being of marginalized and vulnerable people.

**This document can be found on the youthESource at:**  
[youthesource.com/2020/05/11/at-home-discussion-guide-for-40-teaching-end-goals-for-youth-ministry](https://youthesource.com/2020/05/11/at-home-discussion-guide-for-40-teaching-end-goals-for-youth-ministry)





# Who Am I?

## Incorporating Baptismal Remembrance into Youth Ministry

BY THOMAS WIEMER

**WHO AM I?** This is a question that young people (we can only assume) have been asking themselves since the Fall. Teens are asking fundamental questions about identity.

- What is my role in this world?
- What do I want to do with my life and what kind of people do I want alongside me?
- Where will I find success?

These questions can lead to some more self-doubting questions.

- Why is she so much prettier than me?
- Why can't I get as many likes as him?
- Why is everybody so much better at this than I am?
- Will anyone ever want to be around me?



As much as we like to think we have the answers to these questions as adults, the fact is that we still ask ourselves and God these questions. Many of us are married, have families, and are generally happy with our lives. So, why does this self-doubt still plague us? Well, the answer is rather simple: Sin distorts our priorities in life. Let's look at Cain for example:

*"And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering,"*  
Genesis 4:2–4

God created people to be close with him, a part of his perfect family. They were secure in their identity because they knew who God said they were. After the first sin, priorities changed, and our clear identity was broken. Cain, instead of giving his first fruits to God, chose only to give a portion and this led to jealousy. How often do we commit this same sin? We are Baptized into God's family. Yet we fail to live up to God's commands becoming selfish and comparing ourselves with others. We doubt who God tells us we are, especially when we find worldly things more important.

So, how do we, as imperfect human beings, provide answers and comfort to the young people that we care for? The answer is that we can't do it alone. The Holy Spirit works in us reminding us of our identity in Christ

given in our Baptism. In Baptism, as we know, God gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit who helps us remind our youth of their Baptismal identity.

For teens who are searching for identity and asking difficult questions, we want to focus them often on their Baptism. This helps to center them in Christ, rather than in the things of this world and in jealous comparisons. Here are three ways that we can remember and talk about the importance of Baptism in youth ministry.

## Remembering our Baptism

Below are some strategies to remind youth, and ourselves, of some of the gifts God gives us in Baptism.

### PAPER AND WATER

This activity requires little preparation. First, fill a tub with water. Give each student a small piece of paper and have them write anything they want on it: sins that have been bothering them, doubts about themselves, or anything negative that has been on their minds.

Read Isaiah 1:18 out loud to the students. Afterwards, one by one, they can come up to the tub of water, hold their paper on the bottom of it, and “Rub” the words off the paper. Remind them that Jesus washed away our sins and carries our doubts and burdens. These gifts are given to us through Baptism. Every time we are reminded of our Baptism, we are reminded that the Holy Spirit is with us. The Spirit gives us the faith in Jesus that is essential to our Salvation.

### LAUNDRY

Get some white rags, shirts, or something else, and have your youth take them outside. Let them rub them on the grass and dirt outside. Afterwards, wash them (With bleach is necessary). Remind the youth that we are sinful, imperfect, and dirty. However, in our Baptism, we are washed just as white as we were created to be.

This activity would be ideal for an in-home setting, at a retreat center, or anywhere else you have access to a washing machine. You could also pair this with a different activity or Bible Study for while the washer is running.

### MAKING THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

This may seem like a given to some people, but many youth have not been taught to make the sign of the cross. Teach them to put their thumb and their forefinger together, and touch their head, their chest, both shoulders, and their chest again. This sign can be made during the Invocation, the Benediction, and any other time the pastor makes the sign of the cross. This is often indicated in the hymnal or bulletin as well.

Remind your youth that they were baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Every time they make that sign, they are making the same sign that was made at the time of their Baptism. This is a reminder that they were adopted into God’s family and justified by Jesus’ death on the cross!

**This document can be found on the youthESource at:**  
[youthesource.com/2021/03/15/who-am-i-incorporating-baptismal-remembrance-into-youth-ministry](https://youthesource.com/2021/03/15/who-am-i-incorporating-baptismal-remembrance-into-youth-ministry)

# Help Each Young Person Develop a Resilient Identity in Christ



- Resilient youth identify with the life and mission of the Christian church and seek to serve others.
- Resilient youth remain humbly confident in their faith in the face of crisis and transition.
- Resilient youth can build relationships with those different than themselves and navigate disagreements in a humble, loving way.
- Resilient youth are lifelong learners who face doubt and challenge by turning to God's Word.

**LIKE A TREE DEEPLY ROOTED**, youth who understand their Baptismal faith have a strong base from which to grow as Lutheran Christians in this world. But every tree is tested from time to time. **Resiliency is the quality that allows for an individual to bounce back and adapt when faced with stress, adversity, or tragedy.** Resilient Christians can navigate all the challenge and struggle in our world while maintaining their identity in Christ.

Healthy youth ministry helps to root young people in their Christian identity. Regardless of what they face in life they remain humbly confident. When struggles, doubts and questions rise, healthy youth ministry roots youth in Christ. Through transitions and crisis, resilient young people will return to the means of grace as they face the challenges of this world.

Resilient youth identify with the life and mission of the Christian church and seek to serve others. Their faith is not private or only for Sunday mornings. Instead, they recognize that their faith in Jesus Christ connects them with their congregations, a larger church body and the whole Christian church. Youth can be emboldened to share truth in love, serve others and treat people with compassion, as love was first shown to them in Christ.

Resilient youth remain humbly confident in their faith in the face of crisis and transition. Challenges may come unexpectedly or as a part of transitions like graduation, moving, and entering the workforce. In fact, the biggest drop off in worship attendance for those who leave the

church happens right after high school graduation. In these critical times, adults and parents should listen well, empathize, encourage confession and absolution, and pray for youth. The Holy Spirit can work to orient young people back to scripture and continue to engage them in the life of the congregation. In these moments, it is important for Christian adults to prepare and ensure that their own posture or judgement pulls toward, not pushes away, a young person from faith.

**Resilient youth can build relationships with those different than themselves and navigate disagreements** in a humble, loving way. In our divisive, sinful world they are inevitably going to come across resistance. Through the Holy Spirit, resilient youth navigate disagreements in a way which foster relationships while pointing to the truth of the Gospel. As they explore our world, they can listen carefully, ask good question and share both Law and Gospel with confidence. Resilient youth can embrace the diversity of our world, appreciate the breadth of God's family, and embrace others in the name of Christ.

Resilient youth are lifelong learners who face doubt and challenge by turning to God's Word. We love to teach young people well, but there will always be something new to learn. The world, sin, and the Devil will continually seek to throw doubt and challenge at us. Resilient youth are lifelong learners who face these forces by turning to God's living and active Word. In each age and life circumstance, the simple message of God's love

and forgiveness given to us through Jesus needs to be on their minds and lips. **Youth ministry connects young people to the Word of God as they are on the frontline of a changing world.**

God's promises in Baptism can provide a much-needed anchor when circumstances, thoughts and feelings fail

to bring comfort. Parents and supportive adults can actively equip young people and walk with them to ensure they stay deeply rooted in their identity in Christ. By God's grace resilient Christians take the questions, new ideas, and struggles back through the filter of their Baptismal faith and truth known in God's Word.

## Discussion Questions

### FOR YOUTH LEADERS

- How can you remind teens of God's promises to them in times of crisis and transition?
- When have you experienced resistance in sharing the Gospel? How can that experience help as an example (good or bad) for teens?
- How have you seen the church handle disagreements well? Not so well? How can God use those moments to build resilient teens?

### FOR YOUTH MINISTRY TEAMS

- How does your youth ministry prepare youth for the trials of life, including life-altering situations or crisis? How can God use youth ministry to anchor youth to God's promises in their Baptism?
- List some of the transitions youth and young adults are going through. How can a congregation resource and prepare young people for these transitions, especially for those which regularly happen like the beginning college or career life?

### FOR CONGREGATIONAL LEADERSHIP


- How are your leaders and members examples of life-long learners who face doubt and challenge by turning to God's Word?
- How are you connecting to local colleges? How are you helping to connect your students with local congregation and campus ministries?



## BIBLE STUDY:

# Weep with Those Who Weep

BY KRISTIN SCHMIDT, DCE

Download a printable PDF of this study at [YouthESource.com](https://youthesource.com). 

### WE ALL FEAR AWKWARD MOMENTS.

Whether they come about through uncertain pauses, wardrobe malfunctions, or poorly chosen words, nobody wants to be responsible for making another person feel odd. This can be particularly noticeable when working with middle and high school students, who are already trying desperately to avoid the awkward sensations that life seems to be putting them through. We seek to instill a sense of empathy and awareness in teens, hoping to encourage their relational skills and confidence. They are developing personal identity as well as communication dexterity.



At some point in middle or high school (if not sooner), kids will know someone who is faced with a loss or tragedy. When a friend or loved one is hurting, it can be difficult for adolescents to understand how they should best respond. If someone they care for is experiencing grief, they'll naturally want to help, but might be nervous about how to do so. It may feel awkward and even scary. Teens might wonder what to say or do. They might tiptoe on eggshells or avoid the situation altogether. They might be overly sensitive or utterly insensitive. Let's face it, even adults struggle with managing care for a friend who is mourning. It can be even more challenging for an adolescent who is trying to react to a situation they may not understand.

The purpose of this Bible study is to provide helpful ideas for teens to reach out to others who experience grief.

There is no “one size fits all” method. One of the key challenges of youth ministry is reaching out to students who are diverse in experiences, situations, and personalities. Teens process and react to life in unique ways, and they encounter a range of events and challenges as they move through middle and high school. As leaders, we must be aware of this in terms of how we interact with students. However, it is also important when we consider how students engage with one another. We can assist them in their relationships while also growing in our understanding of their personalities. We can offer suggestions, but admit that we don't have all of the answers, and that's okay.

There are a few critical things to keep in mind when dealing with youth who are grieving in any way. These

principles should be shared with teens who wish to demonstrate concern with one another. You may even provide a hand-out of some of these elements, for students to reference as needed.

- Acknowledge that grief is normal and acceptable, and experiencing a range of emotions is healthy and appropriate.
- Understand that the way we express grief is as unique as we are. There is no “right” or “wrong” way to grieve. Their friend may be going through a hard time, and reacting to it in unexpected ways.
- It’s important to sensitively check in regularly on grieving loved ones, and demonstrate genuine care.
- Recognize that grief lingers. It may look different over time, but likely will still be present years after a tough loss.
- Avoid providing trite answers like “just look at the positive” or “you’ll be fine; you can get through it.” Everyone needs space to experience emotions. They might be open to public prayer or Bible verse suggestions, but do not merely toss those things out casually as a quick fix. Let them know you are experiencing true feelings *with* them.
- Be present and ready to listen. You don’t have to “fix” anything. Just be willing to be there for them. Sometimes that’s all we can do, and it’s the best we can do.
- Provide gentle, but specific opportunities for loved ones to share. Rather than broad statements like “let me know if you need something,” or “how are you feeling?”, try something like “who else can you talk to about this?” or “I am praying that God’s peace and presence overwhelm you tonight.”
- Pray for and with the mourning person, if you are comfortable enough to do so.
- Genuinely admit that you do not have all the answers or understanding, but you are willing to listen and to pray.

*\*Remote Note: If possible, the exercises and discussions here would best be done in person. However, there are times that require meeting from a distance. This study includes suggestions to adapt activities for such conditions.*

### Opening: (5–10 Minutes)

Tough situations: begin the study by inviting the group members to contemplate difficult events or seasons in their lives. Have students brainstorm things they have experienced that were especially challenging. Allow them

to share if they are willing, or have them write items down privately. Encourage them to consider how they felt or reacted during stress. What was hardest about the event/ time period?

After this initial conversation (or sooner if it does not yield much), have students think of their reactions when witnessing friends who are hurting. When have they seen people close to them going through a hard time? Is it difficult to know what to say or do? What do they notice about themselves when encountering someone in grief?

If students feel that they have not personally had to go through periods of hardship, invite them to imagine a situation...perhaps challenge them to consider how they would feel if a loved one passed away, or if they received news of poor health. Have them seriously think about the emotions and sorrows that might accompany such a thing.

*\*Note: if preferred for anonymity, you may have students write some of these responses down and place them in a collective spot to discuss. If this study is being conducted online, that of course will not be an option. However, teens could still send a private message to leaders only, if desired.*

### Bible Exploration: (Approximately 20 minutes)

To aid youth who wish to comfort others, offer a Biblical basis for some key principles of demonstrating love and compassion to the hurting. Review a few passages, looking at them one at a time. Allow students to take turns reading, or to read silently or in pairs, depending on your group size, timing, and format. If conducting the meeting online, consider giving all students time to read the passages on their own. Or if time is short, you might share a screen with each passage. After reviewing each one, invite teens to discuss how they think it might apply to a situation of providing hope and healing. A few examples to provide include:

- Proverbs 25:20 (don’t sing songs to a heavy heart)
- Job 16:1–17 (you’ll need to provide a little bit of background here: After losing his children, livestock, and health, Job receives visitors. His “friends” have just told him that he has no reason to be miserable and that God must be punishing Him or have a reason for what is happening. Even Job’s wife advises him to curse God and die. Here, he laments that his companions are not much for comfort! We cannot throw out simple statements or pretend to know more than God).
- Romans 12:15–16 (rejoice when others rejoice; weep with those who weep)
- 2 Corinthians 1:3–7 (God comforts us in all things, in order that we should share comfort with one another)

- Galatians 6:2 (bear one another's burdens)

It will also be useful to give teens some useful verses to share with those who are grieving. You may even consider providing a list (ahead of time or after) of verses that might be helpful to keep in mind. Many Psalms contain genuine solace for grief or trouble. A few suggestions include:

- Psalm 30:1–12 (Weeping lasts through the night, but joy comes with the morning)
- Psalm 73:23–28 (God is a constantly present guide and source of strength)
- Psalms 121 (Our help comes from the Lord, who made and rules over everything)
- Psalm 147:1–6 (God heals the brokenhearted and binds their wounds)
- Isaiah 40:28–31 (All who hope in God will receive new strength)
- Romans 8:18–28 (we are experiencing temporary suffering, but one day will be united with God. Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit helps us in our prayers and lives).
- Revelation 21:4 (God will wipe away all tears; pain and sorrow will disappear)

### Follow-up and Fellowship: (10–15 minutes)

Invite students to practice how they might offer support to a loved one who needs care. If you are meeting in person and group members know each other well, allow them to partner up and find a space together. Provide hypothetical scenarios for them to use, and allow them to role play conversations and reactions they might have in those given situations. Encourage them to act out interactions or just discuss with partners how they might handle various challenges. If you prefer, and especially if this study is taking place in an online format, you can do this exercise as a group. Provide the group with one potential scene at a time, and allow them to brainstorm methods of handling it. A few possible circumstances include:

- A friend who has lost a pet
- A friend who had a close family member pass away

- A friend who had another friend pass away
- A parent losing a job
- A sibling or friend breaking up with a significant other
- A friend whose parents are divorcing

Discuss with students how they might comfort loved ones in these various situations. Talk about how they could sensitively approach friends and provide genuine care. Offer suggestions if teens are having a difficult time coming up with ideas or reactions on their own. Remind them to consider imagining both perspectives in each case.

**Close** with a prayer. If time and willingness allow, have students share prayer requests and pray for one another. Or consider allowing youth members to share the names or struggles of someone they know, who needs lifting up in prayer. Otherwise, offer a general prayer asking God to provide wisdom and care as we love and serve one another.

If space and time offer availability, let students have a few minutes to chat and fellowship before they depart. If you are using an online format, and have a large group, you might even split students into “breakout rooms” for them to talk in smaller clusters of friends. (Close: 2-5 minutes)

### Suggested Resources for teens to support others and cope with loss:

*The Grieving Teen: A Guide for Teenagers and Their Friends* (Helen Fitzgerald)

*When a Friend Dies: A Book for Teens About Grieving & Healing* (Marilyn E. Gootman)

*Straight Talk about Death for Teenagers: How to Cope with Losing Someone You Love* (Earl A. Grollman)

*Resilient Grieving* (Lucy Hone)

*Tear Soup* (Pat Schwiebert)

*Teen Grief: Caring for the Grieving Teenage Heart* (Gary Roe)





# Help Each Young Person Live Out Their Unique Vocation



- Youth understand their role as Christ's hands and feet in their church, home, community, and other areas of vocation.
- Youth reach out to their neighbor in word and deed to love and share the Good News of Jesus.
- Youth serve and lead in their congregation and community.
- Youth seek to be warm, challenging and grace-filled to their community and peers.
- Youth are encouraged to pursue church work vocations as it fits their gifts and skills.

**WHAT AM I HERE ON EARTH TO DO?** How will I know if I've found success? What do I want my life to look like after high school? Adolescence is a time where these big questions emerge. Youth seek direction, significant relationships and to impact their community. They begin to set priorities and long-term goals. In this time of searching, vocation plays an important role in applying their faith and finding their God-given gifts and skills.

**Vocation is a term that literally means "calling." Every Christian is called to unique roles or tasks through which God cares for His creation.** More than just our work, Vocation encompasses all the ways we are Christ's hands and feet in their home, church, community, school, workplace and beyond. As parents and significant adults, we live out critical roles in a young person's life. In our youth ministry, how we teach vocation can help youth discover gifts and build confidence, but most importantly to see any contribution they make as an act and gift from God.

Vocation helps young people to orient themselves to the unique places God has gifted them to serve. It helps young people understand their role as Christ's hands and feet in their church, home, community and other areas of vocation. God uses our ordinary work to accomplish great things, even on the smallest of scales. Young people develop new areas of vocation as they move toward adulthood. The Holy Spirit can use them for great impact and develop in them the satisfaction and joy in the Christian life.

In living out their vocation, youth reach out to their neighbor in word and deed to love and share the Good News of Jesus. As youth begin to understand the needs of the world, they can become overwhelmed. Vocation centers them in where God has placed them and empowers them to live the Gospel out with passion and excellence. It gives them a lens to see their daily activity as a place for God to work powerfully. **Faith is not just for Sunday morning, but for Tuesday afternoon and Christian adults in their life can model this every day.**

Opportunities to serve and lead can be an important tool for building confidence, developing skills all while knowing God is at work in and through them. God sends His people to serve the world in word and deed trusting the Holy Spirit will work through them to open ears and hearts to receive the Gospel. Vocation is not lived out alone, but in congregation and community. All kinds of service and leadership should be encouraged God uses us to point people back to the Gospel.

Youth seek to be warm, challenging and grace-filled to their community and peers. Over time, young people will experience a variety of vocational roles as opportunities and relationships develop and change. In each stage, God continues to call them to share the Gospel and sends the Holy Spirit to make a significant impact through their unique roles. Vocation encourages young people to interact across age, belief system, ability levels, and experiences. **In these relationships they can share God's grace and forgiveness while navigating conflicts and disagreements with truth in love.**

Teaching vocation helps to calm nerves about future roles and focuses on the here and now. As you teach vocation, you will find students who may have the gifts and temperament for church work. Healthy youth ministry encourages youth to pursue church work vocations as it fits their gifts and skills. Healthy congregations can be incubators for future church workers by providing support, encouragement, and foundational training to youth.

**The Lutheran understanding of vocation and the priesthood of all believers can be powerful for teens and young adults. Gen Z is an action oriented and achievement driven generation.** Vocation helps to prioritize their time, gifts and talents. It encourages discipline and excellence while keeping the focus on the Gospel of Jesus. God can use the healthy desire of these young people for action to spread the His Good News and love in their everyday lives.

## Discussion Questions

### FOR YOUTH LEADERS

- What are your vocations? How does God use you in daily life to love others and share the Gospel?
- How can understanding and identifying vocational roles help youth to live out their faith in everyday life?
- Who do you know that might make a good future church worker? How can you encourage them to consider that vocation?

### FOR YOUTH MINISTRY TEAMS

- How does your youth ministry recognize and train young people in using their specific gifts in serve as they grow in maturity and ability?
- Are young people trained to understand how serving well in their current vocation (son, daughter, student, musician, athlete, employee, etc.) is a way to serve other in Jesus' name and bring glory to God?
- Are young people trained to understand how their current vocations translate into future vocations and service in the world?

### FOR CONGREGATIONAL LEADERSHIP

- How can teaching and living out vocation help create inter-generational connections in the congregation?
- How does your congregation recognize and celebrate God-given gifts in individual members of His family?
- Are young people encouraged to see how both mundane and extraordinary service are done in honor to God and service to our neighbor?
- How can the congregation encourage youth to consider church work as a future vocation?

# Introduction to *Leading Lives that Matter* Bible Study Series

BY REV. DR. MARK KOSCHMANN

Download leader and participant guides of the full study at [YouthESource.com](https://YouthESource.com). [↓](#)

## About This Study

What do you want to do when you grow up? I'm sure you've been asked that question before. While it can be fun to imagine all the possible career choices available to us, the question can also create some anxiety for us. *How do I know what I want to do with my life? Is there only one career or job for me to do? What about all the other things I enjoy in my life – friends, family, sports, music, hobbies? How do I fit it all into my life?*

The other challenge we face when thinking about our future work is that it seems to associate our identity with our work or career goals. But isn't my identity more than a job?

As Christians, we recognize that first and foremost we are created and redeemed by God in Christ Jesus. We live not only to please ourselves but also to serve God and others. Instead of asking the question about your future job or career, this study invites you to ask these questions:

- Who has God created and redeemed me to be?
- Who do I want to be?
- How is God calling me to a life of love and service toward others?
- How can I live out my vocation right now?



These questions invite us to consider how we should live our lives as Christians. Building on the theological language of vocation or “calling,” this study explores how God is actively calling you to live a life of faith, work, service, and witness. Most importantly, you live out these multiple callings in the grace, forgiveness, and freedom given to you in Jesus.

## Discerning Your Vocation

Vocation comes from the Latin *vocātiō*, meaning a “call” or “summons.” This study invites you to consider how Christians lead lives that matter. How do you experience God’s calling in your life? Christian writer Frederick

Buechner provides a useful framework for discerning the work that God calls us to do.

*“The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (a) that you need most to do and (b) that the world most needs to have done. If you really get a kick out of your work, you’ve presumably met requirement (a), but if your work is writing cigarette ads, the chances are you’ve missed requirement (b). On the other hand, if your work is being a doctor in a leper colony, you have probably met requirement (b), but if most of the time you’re bored and depressed by it, the chances are you have not only bypassed (a), but probably aren’t helping your patients much either.*

*“...The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”*

— Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 95.

Take some time at the beginning of this study to discuss these two dimensions to Christian concepts of vocation:

Your deep gladness:

- What do you enjoy doing?
- What are you good at doing? What gifts, skills, and talents do you have?
- How can you use these interests, skills, and talents to serve God and other people?

The world’s deep hunger:

- What are the hurts of the world?
- Where is there a need for healing? Where is there a need for service?
- How do you want to help people around you, in the U.S., and around the world?

In addition, there is one more ingredient to your life that makes all the difference as you think about how you should live your life. That ingredient is God’s grace in your life. At the core of your identity is the enlivening work of the Gospel. God’s good news for you in Jesus Christ is that you have a real, living relationship with God. God has called you by his Holy Spirit and sanctifies you to make you uniquely you — just as God created you to be.

God’s word of grace is vital to include in these conversations about calling because it gives us confidence, forgiveness, and peace to know that God is present with us when we succeed and when we fail. Paul writes, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together

for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). Paul concludes this section of his letter to the Christians in Rome with a powerful word of God’s promise:

*“In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 8:37–39).

Nothing will be able to separate you from the love of God that is in Jesus. Jesus is your Lord and Savior. He is your rock. God will be your foundation even as you consider how God is calling you to live a life of faith, work, service, and witness.

## Ways to Use This Study

This study is best used as a four-part series over a few weeks, at a retreat, or on a trip with youth such as a summer service trip. Before you begin the individual lessons, take some time to discuss the overarching study on vocation.

Each lesson is designed to take 45-60 minutes to complete (depending on the length of time set aside for discussion). The discussion questions are intended to foster conversations with youth as a large group but can also be used individually and in small groups.

As a warm-up (or as an extra introductory lesson), take time to consider the quote by Frederick Buechner: “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”

Discuss together the questions under the two headings:

1. your deep gladness and
2. the world’s deep hunger.

You can use this as a visual chart and discussion tool for youth to reflect on God’s callings in their lives.

Remember that your calling is more than one job. God’s callings include all aspects of your life. Typically, these callings pivot around four areas of life: family, work, church, and the world.

## Christian Mentoring

One of the most important components of a study on vocation is for young men and women to have a chance to talk about these ideas aloud to youth leaders and Christian adults who can listen attentively, share their reflections, and pray with them. It is important for adult



leaders to give youth the space to ponder these questions and to feel encouragement and support as they discern the many ways God is calling them.

Christian mentoring is a vital aspect of youth ministry. Youth will notice when you take time to listen and encourage them. The LCMS has put together some excellent resources such as “7 Practices of Healthy Youth Ministry” for congregations based on extensive LCMS research on millennials. Here are four key traits of supportive adult leaders for youth ministry.

- Supportive congregations seek to connect every youth with at least 5 engaged Christian adults.
- Supportive adults deliberately invest and value long-term, inter-generational relationships.
- Supportive adults prepare for and respond to celebration, transitions and crisis.
- Supportive congregations have adults who champion young people and dedicate time and energy to developing teens as disciples of Jesus Christ for life.

The adult youth leaders in my congregation in the suburbs of Chicago were crucial for me as a teenager. One of the adult leaders made a tremendous impact on me by modeling the Christian life. He commuted on the train from the suburbs during the week to work in one of the city's impressive skyscrapers. On Sundays, he led our youth





Bible study small group. He was an engaging teacher, but even more importantly, he listened to us and made us feel comfortable asking questions. He also modeled the Christian life. He shared how he read from the Bible every morning on the train as he commuted to work. He would often share what it was like to be a Christian in a large corporate office and how he felt called by God to do his work with diligence and integrity. But he also emphasized his God-given calling to his family, the church, and to our local community. He became an elder of our church and coordinated our church's volunteers who served meals at a nearby homeless shelter. He made clear that these callings were not about earning his righteousness before God. Rather, he lived out his callings because of the freedom he had as a Christian to lead a life of significance as he fulfilled his callings to his family, work, church, and the wider community.

This Bible study hopes to foster these intergenerational conversations to take place at your congregation, too. By meeting together for prayer and the study of God's Word, youth and adults will grow and learn together about the amazing and surpassing greatness of God's love in Jesus. Go forth with God's grace to work, serve, and witness together in the joy of your risen Savior.

For the full study, please go to [youthsource.com/2019/07/25/bible-study-leading-lives-that-matter/](https://youthsource.com/2019/07/25/bible-study-leading-lives-that-matter/)



# LCMS Youth Ministry

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's Youth Ministry  **LEADS**,  **SERVES**,  **RESOURCES** and  **NETWORKS** youth and adults as a community of God's people where Jesus Christ is the central focus.

## Networks

Join the conversation and stay connected

### LCMS Youth Ministry

[lcms.org/youth](https://lcms.org/youth)


 [LCMSYouth](https://www.facebook.com/LCMSYouth)


 [@lcmeyouth](https://twitter.com/lcmsyouth)


 [@lcmeyouth](https://www.instagram.com/lcmsyouth)

### LCMS Young Adults

[lcms.org/young-adult](https://lcms.org/young-adult)

 [LCMSYoungAdults](https://www.facebook.com/LCMSYoungAdults)

 [@lcmeyoungadults](https://twitter.com/lcmsyoungadults)

 [@lcmeyoungadults](https://www.instagram.com/lcmsyoungadults)

### LCMS Youth Gathering

[lcmsgathering.com](https://lcmsgathering.com)

 [lcmsgathering](https://www.facebook.com/lcmsgathering)

 [@lcmsgathering](https://twitter.com/lcmsgathering)

 [@lcmsgathering](https://www.instagram.com/lcmsgathering)

 [lcmeynyg](https://www.snapchat.com/add/lcmsnyg)

### LCMS Servant Events

[lcms.org/servantevents](https://lcms.org/servantevents)

 [LCMSServantEvents](https://www.facebook.com/LCMSServantEvents)

### YouthESource

[youthesource.com](https://youthesource.com)

 [youthESource](https://www.facebook.com/youthESource)

### YouthLead

[lcms.org/youthlead](https://lcms.org/youthlead)

### LCMS Campus Ministry (LCMS U)

[lcms.org/LCMSU](https://lcms.org/LCMSU)

 [LCMSU](https://www.facebook.com/LCMSU)

 [@lcmeyu](https://twitter.com/lcmsu)

 [@lcmeyu](https://www.instagram.com/lcmsu)

## Featured Resources

### End Goals podcast



Available on KFUO.org,  
Spotify and iTunes  
[kfuo.org/category/lcms-youth-ministry-end-goals](https://kfuo.org/category/lcms-youth-ministry-end-goals)

### LCMS Youth Gathering Updates

Sign up at [lcmsgathering.com](https://lcmsgathering.com)

### Gathering Outreach Grant

Receive funds for your LCMS congregation or organization to reach un-churched and marginally-churched youth. Apply at [lcms.org/youth/gatheringgrants](https://lcms.org/youth/gatheringgrants).

## Upcoming Events

### LCMS Servant Events

Ongoing

[lcms.org/servantevents](https://lcms.org/servantevents)

### YouthLead Training

St. Louis, Missouri | March 17–20, 2022

[lcms.org/youthlead](https://lcms.org/youthlead)

### LCMS Youth Gathering

Houston, Texas | July 9–13, 2022

[lcmsgathering.com](https://lcmsgathering.com)

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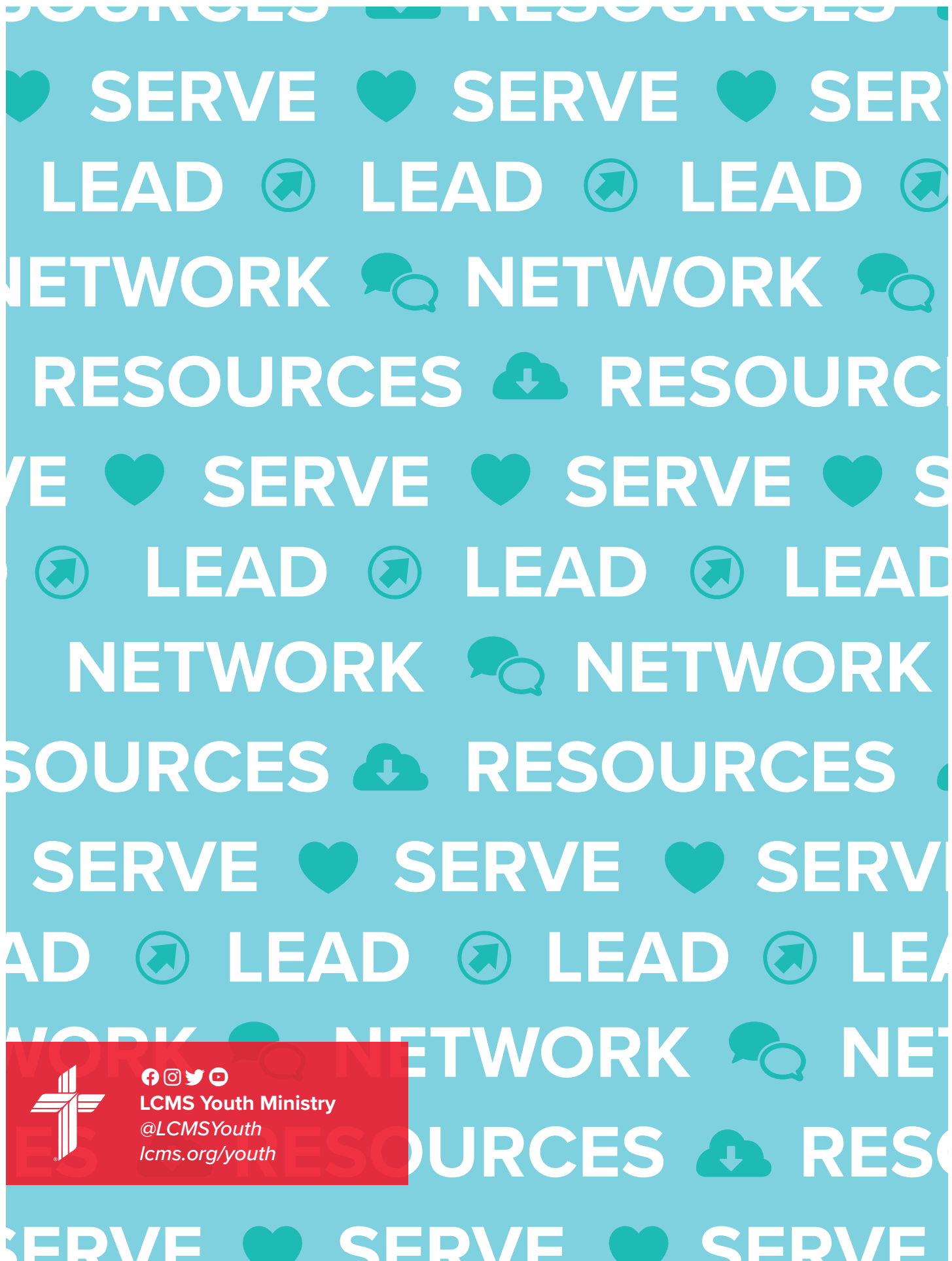
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