



What are the
**Seven Practices of Healthy
Youth Ministry**

We love discussions about healthy youth ministry. In each interaction we catch a glimpse of the church's desire for teens to be disciples of Jesus now and into eternity. LCMS Youth Ministry can see many different models of youth ministry used throughout the years. Past models reflect the faith of young people and the church's longing to help young people mature in their faith in Jesus. Today we can prepare for the unique gifts and challenges of working with this generation of teenagers. In every effort, there is a shared desire to provide young people with a resilient foundation in their Baptismal identity.

LCMS Youth Ministry developed the Seven Practices of Healthy Youth Ministry by spending significant time listening to practitioners, reading data, conducting research, and digging into Scripture to identify the keys for healthy congregational youth ministry. We appreciate the feedback from congregations and practitioners as they have used the resources to facilitate conversation, set goals for youth ministry, support parents, and train and encourage supportive adults. 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 tied to the practices to help congregations make disciples for life by encouraging quality, Christ-centered youth ministry.

Before you dive into this material, we want to highlight a few things you will not see in the 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. Evaluation, transitions, and attitude shifts take time. More than that, the teens in your congregation and the culture around us are always changing. There will be trial and error along the way. Do not be disheartened when your new plans don'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 your work alone. It can be easy to believe that youth ministry succeeds or fails on the work of parents, pastors, commissioned ministers, and other youth leaders. We can even look for a single person to develop healthy youth ministry. 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. Remember that God has given teens a team of parents, congregational leaders, supportive adults, and more to live out their vocational calls together.

7 Practices of Healthy Youth Ministry

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, urban centers, and 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 is shared language to help facilitate conversation. Looking at all Seven Practices can be overwhelming. Instead of thinking about it as tasks that you must complete, think about it as shared language that can help you assess and make wise decisions about youth ministry. It's not meant as rules and law, but rather as a shared frame that helps you direct your time and energy to best care for young people.

This task is worth it. God has called these youth into His family through Baptism. Your 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.

One thing all parents, pastors, commissioned ministers, church staff, and volunteers share is that they take no greater joy than to see young people who are walking in the truth of Jesus. We know youth leaders are praying regularly for God's wisdom and the Holy Spirit to guide their service. Congregational staff and leaders do their best to meet youth where they are at with the love of Jesus through consistent assessment. Parents stay up late thinking about how to best support the faith lives of their teens. We are a team with a shared goal and a focus on Christ.

We live in an ever-changing, ever-challenging world, and the future is uncertain. Into this challenge, the family of Christ boldly relies on God's gifts of His Word, Sacraments, and relationships to be grounded in the truth. When a congregation prioritizes youth ministry, youth will be able to both hear and see their value and place in the congregation.

We provide the Seven Practices as a framework to join in the efforts to support young people's lifelong walk as a disciple with Jesus. 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. There will be pieces of the Seven Practices that will prompt even more questions. In fact, we will have a series of questions after every practice handout for you to think about and discuss as parents and leaders in your congregation.

Thank you for dedicating your time, heart, and energy to the care of today's youth. May God bless you richly as you serve the youth of your congregation. We share the heart of youth leaders to see more young people have a saving faith in Jesus. LCMS Youth Ministry is praying for you and desires to serve you as you build healthy congregational youth ministry.

"I have no greater joy **than to hear my children are walking in the truth."**
3 John 1:4

Seven 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. 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.


Read more about the 7 Practices in a new book available now from Concordia Publishing House or find more resources at YouthESource.com.

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 40 End Goals.)
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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 from 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.
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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.
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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 celebrations, transitions, and crises.
- Supportive congregations 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.



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 the 40 End Goals.)

Helping youth 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 one-time event; rather 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 light and salt in the world.

Their identity as a Child of God makes them different than the world around them which is challenging in our current culture. But that identity 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 and Alpha have greater numbers of those who do not ascribe to any religious belief than previous generations. 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.

Healthy youth ministry sees youth regularly worshiping, study the living and active Word of God, praying together, and receiving 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 understanding 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. Healthy youth ministry should be defining goals by asking the questions "How do you want your youth to be different because of their time in youth ministry?" 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.

Young people are facing challenges to their 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 Individuals

- 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 would you like your young people to be different because of their time in youth ministry?
- 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 high school graduation? 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?

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 challenges, transitions, and struggles in our world while maintaining their identity in Christ. When struggles, doubts and questions rise, healthy youth ministry firmly roots youth in Christ, helping them to return to the Means of Grace as they face challenges.

Resilient youth identify with the life and mission of the Christian church and seek to serve others. Their faith is not private or exclusively 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 show humble confidence. Humble confidence means youth recognize their sin, acknowledge their need for forgiveness, and look for the good gifts of God for us.

Their confidence comes from their gift of faith as they trust God's promises and reflect God's love to others. Challenges may come unexpectedly or as a part of transitions like changing relationships, graduation, entering the workforce, and more. In these critical times, supportive adults and parents model humble confidence by listening well, empathizing, encouraging confession and absolution, and prayer. The Holy Spirit works to orient young people back to Scripture and continues to engage them in the life of the congregation. In these moments, it is important Christian adults 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 opposition to their faith. Through the Holy Spirit, resilient youth navigate disagreements in a way that fosters relationships while pointing to the truth of the Gospel. As they explore our world, they can listen carefully, ask good questions, 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 Individuals

- 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 to be humbly confident?
- How are you as supportive adults helping them prepare 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 do youth see humble confidence in adults, especially leaders, in their church?
- 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?

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 when these big questions emerge. Youth explore identity, build significant relationships, and begin to see how they can impact their community. They also 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." God calls His Baptized children to love Him and serve their neighbor. 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 youth are Christ's hands and feet in their home, church, community, school, workplace, and beyond. As parents and supportive 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 roles, responsibilities, and relationships 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. Christian adults can model faithfully live out their vocations every day in their sphere of influence.

Opportunities to serve and lead can be an important tool for building confidence and 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.

Teaching vocation helps to calm nerves about future roles and focuses on the here and now. Vocation is not lived out alone, but in congregation and community. All kinds of service and leadership should be encouraged 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. 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. Young people are seeking to know what faith in action looks like. 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 Individuals

- 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 you and the youth you know 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 service 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 intergenerational 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?

Congregations Have

Warmth, Challenge, and Grace



- Congregations foster an open and honest environment where youth share joys, questions, crises, and doubts, 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 its 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, and 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 an intentional invitation to be known and seen by the community of believers. Everyone, including guests and regular attendees, should be welcomed generously to worship and ministry program and given what they need to focus on God's gifts for them.

Healthy youth ministry is hospitable, and all Baptized members are consistently reminded and shown they are an important part of the body of Christ.

As we receive God's forgiveness and love, warmth encourages us share it freely with others.

There are key actions we can take to help foster warmth. Youth ministries can connect teens across generations where they can be known and know others. Warmth can be seen when peers create space to care for one another, pray together, and share God's Word. Christian adults throughout the congregation model lives of faith with honesty and joy. This warmth in a congregation allows for an open and honest environment where youth share joys, questions, crises, and doubts 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 and truth, 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.

Deeply rooted in their faith, adults prepare well for deep spiritual conversation and are dedicated to continuing to build relationships over time as difficult issues are addressed. 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.

In these relationships they can share God's grace and forgiveness while navigating conflicts and disagreements with truth in love. 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.

Grace in our relationships and congregational environment 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 congregational environment, but it is key to healthy youth ministry. While they might not always articulate it with these words, teens are looking for these qualities in other places and even online, but the church is the one place that can not only care for their emotional, relational, physical, and mental health, but their spiritual wellbeing as well. An environment of warmth, challenge, and grace is not created overnight. It cannot be superficial or selective. 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. Warmth, challenge, and grace are made person by person and through consistent effort over time.

Discussion Questions

For Individuals

- Who has been a good example to you of warmth, challenge, and grace? What actions did they take that made you feel this way?
- What words would you use to describe your congregation?
- What words would a youth or visitor use to describe your congregation?
- What youth do you personally know and how do you show warmth, challenge, and grace to them?
- What personal stories do you have that might help youth see faith in action through failure, grace, challenge, and joy?

For Youth Ministry Teams

- What space (physical, digital, or through time together) have you created to allow youth to study God's Word together at a developmentally appropriate level?
- Would you say your youth ministry is a safe place for young people to struggle? If so, why? If not, what changes can you make to help create that environment?
- How can we create opportunities for youth leaders or congregation members to 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

- Are the youth who attend worship and other congregational programs welcomed and known by the adults in the congregation?
- 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?

7 Practices of Healthy Youth Ministry

Congregations Have **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 celebrations, transitions, and crises.
- Supportive congregations seek 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. Data from LCMS Youth Ministry shows the value of supportive adults, including the 2016 study which showed 72% of Millennials who remained active in the church into their 20s said they had a safe person to talk to at church in their youth compared to 35% of who were not affiliated with any church at the same age.

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 young people. All this helps each young person to feel seen and known by an adult who has their best interest at heart.

The role of a supportive adult doesn't need to be complex or time consuming. Any number of adults can serve as supportive adults including extended family, Christian teachers and coaches, church workers, and members of the congregation. Their connection to young people can come from deliberate programs or can develop organically. A good place to start is to ask young people 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 a teen during a short season. However, long-term relationships are uniquely equipped to engage and re-engage youth over time through congregational leadership changes and a teens' transitions 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 crises. 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, partnering with parents, and keeping open communication 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 the young person needs.

Supportive congregations seek to have adults who champion young people and dedicate time and energy to developing teens as disciples of Jesus Christ for life. Youth ministry champions are advocates for teens across the congregation. These are special adults who are passionate about caring for the young people in your congregation, ensuring teens have a place and space to grow as disciples for life.

As youth seek to better understand who God is and what God has done for 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 child, pre-teen, teen, and young adult by faithful Christian adults is powerful for congregations.

Discussion Questions

For Individuals

- 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 intergenerational connections that engage more supportive adults?

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. 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. Parents aren't on their own. 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 step in as an engaged parent. 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 either 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.

Data from LCMS Youth Ministry, Lutheran Hour Ministries, and Barna all show that young people are more likely to be retained in the church when they 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.

Discussion Questions

For Individuals

- 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 do you talk about and engage parents as partners with the same goals for young people?
- 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 work with parents to understand each child's unique 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?
- How does your congregation support adult discipleship and facilitate opportunities for them to serve and lead within the church?

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 belonging and ownership while positively impacting their congregation and community. LCMS Youth Ministry's research showed that 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 or 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 teens offer. All young people can provide 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. These opportunities should be suited to their gifts and skills as well as ensure proper instruction and support. Young people are watching the church and looking for the love of Christ to overflow to their neighbor. 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. While all young people can contribute and serve, not every young person is a good fit for load-bearing leadership right now. Choose young people and their mentors carefully, making sure they are deeply rooted in their Baptismal identity and have the time to dedicate to leadership development.

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, the congregation should offer them 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 Individuals

- 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 have a meaningful contribution to ministry?
- How can you encourage both experienced and young leaders to work together?

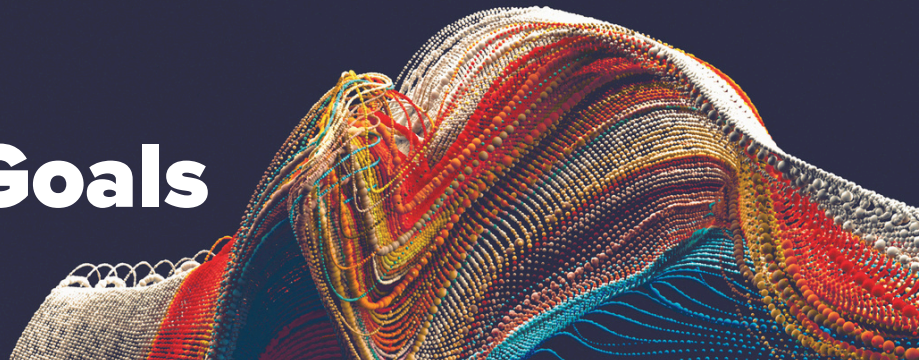
For Youth Ministry Teams

- 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?
- Where could you incorporate young leaders into already existing opportunities with helpful mentors?
- Who are current leaders in your church who might be good at mentoring a young leader?

40 End Goals



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; 1 John 4:10)
- Jesus calls me to faith and is with me daily as I live in baptismal grace. (Matt. 28:19–20; Gal. 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 Cor. 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; Phil. 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; Col. 3:20, Eph. 6:1–3)
- Through my baptism, God gathers me into His body/community, the Church. (Eph. 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; 1 Cor. 11:17–34; Heb. 10:25; Luke 10:16)
- Christ unites my church community in love, and we are strengthened to live in His love. (Col. 3:12–17)
- Christian communities, especially families, are places I can receive and practice forgiveness. (Mark 11:25; Matt. 6:12; 2 Cor. 5:16–21; Col. 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. (Rev. 5; Heb. 12:1–2)
- The Church embraces and values the diversity of ethnicity, language, and culture God has created in His community. (Gal. 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. (Gal. 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)

- 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. (Matt. 6:8–14; 1 John 5:13–15; John 17:15; Mark 11:24; Psalm 17:6; Psalm 145:18; Phil. 4:6; Col. 4:2)
- Out of love for my neighbor, I strive to be a witness of Christ in word and deed. (Matt. 4:19; Matt. 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”. (Eph. 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; Eph. 6:12; John 1:9–13; 1 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.).
- 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; Phil. 2:1–4)
- As a Christian, I love and respect all people and work as a steward of God’s creation. (Gen. 1:28; Mark 16:15)
- I rely on God to give me “daily bread” and strive to be good stewards of these gifts. (Matt. 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 Tim. 2:1–2; Heb. 13:17; Eph. 6:1–3; Col. 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. (Phil. 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. (Matt. 4:19; Matt. 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.

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.).