

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?