

Rebuilding A Youth Program

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When considering rebuilding a youth program, as Christians we must remember what wise King Solomon says in Psalm 127:1, "Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it." (The New King James Version is used in this paper) When trying to revitalize youth ministry we must remember what we confess in the Nicene Creed: "And I believe in the Holy Ghost, The Lord and Giver of Life." Therefore I invite you to join me in seeking out and discussing some Biblical principles that will guide us in rebuilding a youth program.

PRINCIPLE #1: KNOW YOUR YOUTH

Jesus said to Peter, "Feed My lambs." John 21:15c. This implies that we must really know our youth individually and collectively—their needs, their hopes, sorrow, joys, and fears; understand them as total persons

body, mind, and spirit as God created them. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, says, "I know My sheep, and am known by My own." John 10:14. How can we properly feed Jesus' lambs unless we really know them? And is our knowing them all that is implied by the word Jesus used in the Greek? And how may we attain this intimate knowledge?

One way to get to know them is to observe them where they are. Jesus could be found at a well, in a fishing boat, at a party, in homes, in the market place—where people were. How can we observe our youth so that we may learn to know them better?

Another way to get to know our youth is to listen to them. Jesus knew what was in the heart of people, but we don't. However He points I, out that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." Matthew 12:34b. So let's talk with them and listen. James offers a great piece of advice on communication, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God." James 1:19-20. Are we listening to our youth. How can we listen better?

Another way to get to know our youth is to ask others. Solomon advises us, "Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety." Proverbs 11:14 Whom may we ask regarding our youth. Reading a good book is another way of asking people. Have you read any good books lately that give depth and understanding into the youth of the eighties?

PRINCIPLE #2: PROVIDE A ROLE MODEL FOR YOUTH

Jesus not only said that He knew His sheep, but He also said that His sheep knew Him. Do your lambs know you? carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions..." 2 Timothy 3:10-11a You see a relationship existed between Paul and Timothy. Paul does not say "Don't do as I do, Do as I tell you." He says, "Do as I do." He echoes Jesus' "Follow Me." Paul sends no double message to Timothy. How can we develop that kind of relationship with our youth?

Provide a model for youth to follow. A model of repentance. James admonishes us "Confess your trespasses to one another and pray for one another." James 5:14. Do we find it difficult or impossible to admit mistakes or sins to youth and then try to cover up by making excuses or pulling rank? Model empathetic repentance for others in discipline others. Jesus advises, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the

same measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck out of your eye; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye.'" Matthew 7:1-5. Listen to how Paul speaks of himself to Timothy, "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man..." 1 Timothy 1:12-13.

Educators and Scripture agree that a child learns primarily by following a specific role model. What person or persons have you modeled your life or ministry after? What kind of role model are you presenting to your youth? What other kinds of roles should you model to your youth?

PRINCIPLE #3: YOUTH ARE TALENTED MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH TODAY

So often we talk about the youth as being the church of tomorrow. However, at confirmation we "invite and welcome them, as members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and of this congregation, to participate with us in all the rights and privileges of the Evangelical Lutheran Church..." They are part of the church today. Do we treat them as such?

According to Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4 God has given to each one some gift or talent, which is to be used in building the Church. And to the extent that each member is functioning, the Church is being built up. What function can youth do that builds our church? How do we view our youth—only as they are or as God sees them and calls them to be? As a Saul or as a Paul? Trusting in God's Word how can we look for that talent, help each youth discover it in himself and others, develop it, and deploy it in ministry?

PRINCIPLE #4: CHALLENGE YOUTH WITH THEIR GLORIOUS CALLING IN CHRIST

Ponder the challenges Scripture excites youth with. John 1 calls them children of God. 2 Corinthians 5 calls them ambassadors for Christ; Romans 12 living sacrifices; Acts 1 witnesses; 1 Peter 5 living stones, a holy priesthood, a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people; and Matthew 5 salt of the earth and light of the world. These are powerful illustrations of what God calls and empowers them to be. Are our youth aware of this? Are they challenged by it? Or are they caught up and enslaved by the negativism and cynicism of the world? Do you know of any other challenges God lays before our youth? How may we challenge them?

PRINCIPLE #5: TRAIN AND EQUIP YOUTH FOR MINISTRY

It seems apparent that the teachers in the early church expected their students to grow to a point spiritually and intellectually where they became active participants in the discipline process. What an exciting objective to teach others to teach others! The writer to the Hebrews says, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food." Hebrews 5:12. Paul instructs young Timothy, "You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." 2 Timothy 2:1-2.

How do we train and equip youth? Moses gives a model for us, "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit down, in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as

frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” Deuteronomy 6:6-9

In Colossians 1:9b-11 Paul in his prayer suggests five aspects of the process of spiritual growth: 1. “that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will”(BIBLE) 2. “in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (LIFE IMPLICATIONS) 3. “that you may have a walk worthy of the Lord” (RESPONSE) 4. “being fruitful in every good work”(FRUIT) and 5. “increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy.” (KNOW GOD BETTER)

But aren't the youth too young, too inexperienced for ministry? Paul tells us, “But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the-world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are.” 1 Corinthians 1:27-28. God chose young, despised David over his other brothers to be anointed king of Israel 1 Samuel 16. And look at the reaction of the Sanhedrin to the apostles. “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.” Acts 4:13.

A caution is in order here. Here is a formula to ponder: Impression without Expression equals Frustration. To motivate our youth with the Gospel and then not to provide guidance and an outlet to express joyful service leads to absolute frustration and alienation. What programs can we develop to train and equip our youth to serve the Lord and the Church according to their gifts? Do people marvel at our youth and realize that they have been with Jesus? How can that be accomplished?

PRINCIPLE #6: DO NOT ALIENATE YOUTH

Have we stressed the second portion of Paul's well cited admonition neglecting the first “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” Ephesians 6:4. Paul repeats this in Colossians 3:21: “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.” How may we alienate and discourage our youth? How do we? Not listening: Not trusting? Expecting more from them than adults?

PRINCIPLE #7: STRENGTHEN THE HOME

Implied in the last passages and taught elsewhere in the Bible is the necessity of a Christian home. Children are influenced during their most formative years by their home situation. What can the church do to train and equip spouses to parent? What about the single parent home? What support can the church provide Youth struggling with bad home situations

PRINCIPLE #8: DON'T NEGLECT THE POWER OF PRAYER

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways...The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.” James 1:5-8; 5:16b-18. How may we employ the power of prayer more effectively in youth ministry?

There is no one perfect way to design a youth ministry. While there are several basic Biblical principles, the way churches choose to structure their ministry with youth varies widely. Study and evaluate these principles and apply them to your unique situation. There are

many fine suggested methods available from the Board For Parish Education. Design a custom youth ministry for your congregation with the resources God has given you under the guidance of the Holy Ghost.