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EDITOR'S NOTES

As I read the copy for this number of Issues I was reminded of an incident that happened when my wife and I were seated at a dinner table in a dinner theater with two other couples we had just met. The other couple was a young couple with a small boy. The boy was about five years old. He was sitting in a highchair and eating. Suddenly, the boy threw his fork and knife on the table and said, "I don't want to eat tonight. I want to do a Dastick" table prayer. "Then they folded their hands and prayed, 'God, save me, the man's worth nothing, and we thank Him for this food.'"

As we ate, the couple proceeded to show us the details of their little daughter's prayer. They had been saying over their heads they had wished for a child. They taught their children to be appreciation of our roles in the church, and their children are active in our meetings and services. When we support or coach them, we are enriched. Together we can help to do a better job of this ministry. Our schools, churches, and communities will be strengthened for the work of the Lord through this ministry. This message is sent to our members with the hopes that we will cooperate with each other in this ministry. We want to hear the good news of our congregation. All other contributions are members of the Concordia Student Association.

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SPRING 1988
Serving Young People Well

Some thoughts prompted by a quotation by C.F.W. Walther

C.F.W. Walther, our first synodical president, is quoted as saying, “You cannot use your time to better advantage than by serving well the young people of the congregation.” His concern for and support of ministry to young people led a few years after his death to the formation of a youth organization which served The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod for over 80 years. While the organization has changed — Walther League, an independent auxiliary, was replaced in 2007 by Lutheran Youth Fellowship, an integral part of Synod’s LCMS interest and support of youth ministry has never slowed down, and this is reflected in most congregations in many ways.

Have you ever wondered why youth ministry has often rated such specialized concern? I believe the answer is that as their children enter adolescence, parents begin to realize that their children are no longer the children they once were. They are now old enough to make their own decisions about their independence. Youth ministry then is an effort to extend the ministry of the church and family through the teenage years.

The words of Walther are not misplaced. “You cannot use your time to better advantage than by serving well the young people of the congregation.” While Walther was no doubt speaking to young seminary students — future pastors — I suggest that his advice is also good for parents, lay leaders, youth counselors, and average church members. Ask yourself this question, “How do we serve youth well?”

Let me offer two simple (and not original) thoughts which I feel need to be shared with the parents of today — especially the parents of all the not-so-cute teenagers in our congregations.

The first is this: Don’t start too late! One saying goes, “As the twig is bent, so grows the tree.” The attitudes and interests of young people are set in place long before they approach the teenage years. While parents’ anxiety may increase as youth approach junior and senior high, their ability to influence (and even the ability of the church to influence) is already at that point in the race. Don’t wait to plant the seed of faith through Sunday School, familydevotions, and time together as a Christian family. Do it now.

And I have a second warning: Don’t climb the wrong mountain! Modern Americans seem to have “mountain-climbing” instincts. The urge to excel is strong in our generation, and parents seek to give their children every advantage — good education, sports activities, music lessons, quality-life style. Parents offer them every opportunity to excel. It will all be in vain if the choice of priorities involves only that they reach the top of the wrong mountain. “What does it profit a man, if he gains the whole world but loses his own soul?” Any mountain is the wrong mountain if it displaces Christ Jesus from the throne of our lives and life. In the family’s decisions regarding how time will be spent, Jesus must be the primary focus. He is our mountain to climb.

Do modern-day Lutherans (or other Christians) maintain the same direction, toward a common goal, or do they as teams of called workers, pastors, teachers, and parents work on their own turf forming one, two, three, a dozen, or even a college of leaders? What is the situation in your church — in your family — in your position.

Our text is “well-schooled” youth. We cannot afford a youth ministry which does not serve the needs of youth and their families, or a ministry which serves only a few. Our goal — through LYM groups, the Ambassadors for Christ, drama, gatherings, missions, Bible studies and all the rest — is to reach out to young people in our congregation and community. By God’s grace, we seek to be making progress toward that goal. We pray that it will be the same for others as well, so that they can see the time to be served better than by serving well the young people of the congregation.

Tom Nomsela

Teaming Up for Effective Ministry

On the wall of a service station in a small Ne-
braska town hangs an old dust-covered, ap-
yeard-painted sign which shows two large work horses harnessed and hitched in a large team. They are ready to go. They are a force to be reckoned with. One pulls, the other pulls, but they are a force to be reckoned with.

The strong of the two may not be the horses alone. They are a team, a team of two, each pulling in opposite directions. The colt runs rings. "Pulling together makes a job easier."

The horses may expand their energy and go through exhaustion, having accomplished nothing. The stronger of the two may not be the large and the team now have other animals as well. One’s horses may break sending both pushing uncontrollably on their opposite ways. Each of these possibilities would have less effect on the borderer than if the horses were to team up and pull together.

Making the assumption that the mission of the two horses was to move the rock, it is likely that the task would be accomplished unless something happens to change their individual goals or unity that effort.

Even the Lord’s disciples had a problem with goals and team work. They were frequently pulled in a direction opposing the Savior. Peter, the impulsive one, recited a cluster of gigantic pro-
prophecies to make him realize which is the proper direction. James and John longed over who would be the greatest. Jesus reminded them both that neither was to be greatest but all were to serve, working together, meeting the needs of others.

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Teaming Up for Effective Ministry

CHRISTIANITY TODAY

A Neglected Ministry

"I have God!" A young mother stood facing me. Crammed in her arms was her newborn. She exclaimed, "I have God!" She pointed to her newborn and said, "I have God!" I asked her, "How did you come to have a child with a crochet hook in his mouth?"

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Why Get Involved in a Preschool Ministry?

"Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." (Mark 10:14)

For more than 50 years, congregations of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod have been providing Sunday school classes for three- and four-year-old children, who are the ages most commonly referred to by the term "preschool." Some congregations also have included such young children in their vacation Bible school classes. In recent years, however, a number of congregations have been extending their ministry to include preschoolers in classes that meet half-day sessions twice, three, or five times per week; and a growing number of congregations are sponsoring programs of full day care for groups of children that include those of ages three and four. The 1972 Synodical Yearbook was the first of the Synodical yearbooks to take note of this, when it reported 10,140 prekindergarten children in Lutheran schools. The 1986-1987 Lutheran school statistics report 1400 preschools and day care centers in operation in Missouri Synod Lutheran congregations,4 with 54,091 prekindergarten children enrolled. 5

Family Needs and Structure Are Changing

Why are so many congregations getting involved in a preschool ministry? One answer to this question might be that they are attempting to meet more of the needs of the changing society in the United States. "In perhaps the greatest social change of this century, women are entering the paid labor force in ever-increasing numbers. Among women, mothers of young children are the fastest growing group of workers in the nation." This statement in the report, "The Child Care Crisis in Texas: An Introduction to the Problem," is followed by the statistic that more than 84% of mothers of children under six years of age were in the paid labor force in 1984. Deckner and Deckner report that "the number of children younger than six years of age with mothers in the work force was 5.3 million in 1970, and is projected to nearly double by 1990." 6 Many of these children are living in single-parent families, which comprise 10% of all United States families. 7

Family structures and lifestyles in the United States have definitely changed, and Deckner and Deckner note that "Most parents, even the advantaged -- economically, educationally, and physically and emotionally healthy -- often feel inadequate in trying to meet the demands of our rapidly changing society. Early childhood programs need to offer support to these parents as they help their children develop during the early years." 8

Day Care - A Need and Opportunity

Full day care is a primary need for many families; and many churches have become involved in meeting this need. A study by the National Council of Churches of Christ, completed in 1982, found that churches are the single largest providers of child care in this country. One church out of four operates a preschool program. About half of these programs are actually operated by the church, while the others are operated by individuals or groups who rent space from the church. The 14,569 programs identified in this 1982 study did constitute the largest single sector of the "child care market." The report noted that, for every child in Sunday school, eight children are in church-housed care Monday through Friday. 9 Aren't there already enough church-related programs for young children, then? Of course, there is never enough child care to meet the needs of families, but the NCC report identified another fact that should be of concern. Explicit religious instruction was often conspicuously absent in the child care programs being operated in church facilities. Spiritual development was indicated as a program goal by only one-fifth of church-operated programs that serve preschoolers, and by only 10% of those that serve infants and toddlers. Seventy-eight percent of church-operated programs did indicate that religious beliefs are important considerations in the hiring of staff, but only 29% of independent centers in churches said that. This would imply that there is another valid answer to the question, "Why Get Involved in a Preschool Ministry?" God's people need to be concerned about the spiritual development of young children who are in a critical period of life for forming attitudes and values.

Preschool Education is Growing

Full day care is a major national need that will be highlighted in April of 1988 in a national, prime-time television special on public television, "Who Cares for the Children?" This special, produced by the Public Television Outreach Alliance, will "showcase some of the most innovative and successful solutions in the country to providing quality child care through progressive use of resources." 10

Preschool children are going to school for any level of education. 11 Preschool children are going to school. At present, most preschool programs are privately operated by individuals, churches, or for-profit groups. A growing trend, however, is for public schools to create classes for preschoolers. While many states had already been offering free public schooling for preschool children with developmental disabilities, the number of states offering programs for non-disabled four-year-olds continues to grow each year. In 1986 both New York and Delaware began offering classes in some of their public schools, joining the District of Columbia, New Jersey, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania, who had already been offering such programs in many of their schools. The state of Iowa passed legislation in 1986 that could put 4-year-olds into their public schools in the early 1990's.

Congregations from the various Lutheran church bodies have already become much involved in preschool ministry. In his Foreword to the new manual for preschool boards and administrators, Managing Lutheran Preschools, Dr. Martin Weiser reported that there are currently over 2,000 Lutheran preschools, most of which were started and are now being operated by congregations. More than 15,000 board members and directors are involved in these operations, and more than 60,000 students, along with their parents, are being served by these Lutheran preschools. Lutheran congregations have discovered that "the preschool ministry is an important function in carrying out the mission of the Lutheran congregation." 12 It was stated in the 1983 Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Convention Proceedings, Res. 2-17, that we as a church body believe that "the most effective educational agencies available to the church for equipping church members and youth for ministry are the full-time Lutheran elementary (including preschool) and secondary schools." 13 The fact that some 54,091 children were in LC-MS preschool programs in 1986 indicates that many congregations believe this. The Lutheran preschool can help to carry out the five functions of the congregation: education, worship, fellowship, service and outreach. 14

Preschools Feed Jesus' Lambs

A high quality preschool is carefully designed to provide appropriate experiences for each child at her/his level of development. Such a Lutheran preschool provides a stimulating setting for the development of the whole child. In a climate of Christian love and caring, children explore interesting materials, and they develop their intellectual skills through experimentation and discovery learning. They sing and laugh and work and play with other children under the guidance of dedicated Christian teachers, and thus grow in social skills and knowledge. Their physical "selves" develop as they run and jump and hop, when they...
play on climbing equipment, and when they handle puzzles to develop their fingers and blocks and toys. The creative life of the young child develops as she/he experiences a variety of art media, dramatizes favorite stories and poems, sings and dances, and learns to paint. This is the emotional "self" of the young child develops as she/he experiences joy, sadness, anger, and the full range of other human emotions. The "body" of the young child is the body of the Christian preschool. Learning that no matter how naughty one is, Jesus still loves and forgives you because you are His child is also important to learn. The children, Trinity is able to teach ears that would not otherwise be hearing the Gospel.

The most important experiences by the children, their teachers, and the other staff members who are working around the church facilities when preschool classes are in session. It is also experienced in parent meetings, and in small gatherings of people who meet to make plans for the equipment for the program. Support, encouragement, and caring are felt as children and adults meet to work, play, or worship together as members of the body of Christ. Children begin to get a feeling for "church" as being more a group of people who love God and one another rather than as just a building.

The Lutheran Christian preschool is providing a service to the community with its educational program for the children. Study groups for parents and other interested adults, especially those relating to various aspects of child development, are another service that many congregations are providing through their preschools. Children might sing in nursing homes and visit with the "grandpas and grandmas" who live there. They may participate in gathering food for the community pantry, and clothing for the needy in their community or in other places.

Some Concerns Evaluated

Might there be some good reasons for not getting involved in a preschool ministry? At the conclusion of Chapter 11 in Managing Lutheran Preschools, Dr. Glenn Bloom shares a story that illustrated some of these concerns. Some people believe that preschool children are too young to go to school, and that they should be at home with their mothers. Many preschool children are at home with their mothers much of the time, but many others do not have a mother at home during the day and are spending their waking hours in some other place other than their home anyway. It is also said that preschools are just babysitting services, and that all the children do is play. While some of the information shared earlier in this article should help to dispel that concern, it is also true that young children learn effectively through play, which has been called by many prominent educators, child's work. Trustees and persons in charge of other programs of the church fear that the preschool will use space that the church needs for other purposes. The church may use that space for other purposes. The church may use that space for other purposes. The church may use that space for other purposes. It is true that some congregations have been operating in the LC-MS sharing space with the Sunday school or the Boy Scouts or the Girl Scouts or the Early Childhood Education programs in River Forest, Illinois. A key publication from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) to assist in recognizing the planning for a program that is developmentally appropriate for young children is the newly expanded edition of Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children Birth through Age Eight. integrating the Faith; Vol. 1 for Preschool and Kindergartens is indispensable when it comes to actually plan the program; and the Eternal Word religion curriculum materials from Concordia Publishing House. St. Louis, Missouri for Prekindergartens are excellent! Dedicated Christian teachers are being trained in the Early Childhood programs at a number of the LC-MS congregations. Contact the Director of School Ministry for information and on credentials on available candidates.

Why get involved in a preschool ministry? The best reason is that it is a real ministry to the people of God - to those who already know Him, and to many who do not.

References

Why a Parish Ministry to Children is Crucial Today!

When I was a child growing up in Minnesota, there were many things that made a lasting impression on me. Strangely enough, one of the strongest impressions came from the Gerber's baby food commercial, "Babies Are Our Business - Our Only Business." Through the words of this commercial and the sight of the half-dressed baby in the commercial, the Gerber people tried to convey to the television audience that their company made it their business to provide nutritious food for all babies, so that these small children would receive a good start in life and be able to have a healthy future.

Lutheran educators of today have no choice but to establish a motto that is parallel to this long-lived Gerber commercial. In order to ensure that children are treated with the genuine concern that God intended, we must all boldly state that in Lutheran education, "Children Are Our Business - Our Only Business." The business of Lutheran education is to ensure that children will get a nutritious spiritual, emotional, social, aesthetic, intellectual and physical diet to enable them to have a healthy future.

Children Are Very Important to God

Children are important creations of God. Already in Genesis 3:4 we are told that children are a gift of God. In Psalms 127:3 we learn that children are a blessing and a heritage of the Lord. They are a result of God's goodness. Concern for children is also evident in Scripture. When some tired, discouraged disciples thought that "children should be seen and not heard" they were quickly chastised by our Lord who blessed the children and wanted them near Him.

We are reminded in God's Word that it is "child-like" faith that is strong and healthy. When God inspired the Bible, He did not leave references to children out of the text. He made sure that Bible scholars would understand that He was a young David who slew a mighty Goliath; that He was a young Daniel that refused to bow to idols; that He was a baby Moses who was already in infancy selected as a strong leader; that it was a young boy's lunch that was used to feed 5000; that it was Naaman's servant girl who convinced his wife that he should go to the river; and that it was a young Jonathan and a young David who discovered the meaning of friendship early in their lives.

God has given directives to parents in the book of Ephesians and Colossians concerning their relationship to their children. He warns parents not to discourage their children; anger their children; or irritate their children. Instead God desires that parents raise their children in Christian instruction and discipline. This is an awesome task. It is a task that is so immense that our Lutheran church has seen fit to establish Lutheran day schools to assist parents in this God-given command.

Parents Need a Strong Spiritual Partner

Lutheran schools exist in our country long before the organization of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. The dominant role of Lutheran schools has been to train children in the way of the Lord.

Lutheran classrooms are far different today than they were even as late as the fifties. The classrooms are now heterogeneous classrooms made up of children from various denominations; children of unchurched families; children who do not speak English; children from many different cultural and racial backgrounds; children from single-parent homes; children of dual-working parents; latchkey children; children from homes with "live-in" children from homes where abuse is rampant, and the list goes on. Never before in the history of Lutheran schools has the need to help parents nurture their children been greater. Never before has Lutheran education needed to take more seriously the slogan, "Children Are Our Business - Our Only Business." The school and the home are going to have to become stronger partners in the education of children.

Vital to becoming partners in education is getting to know the families with whom the school is to become partners. Home visits are an asset (a must) in getting to know the families and the homes from which children come. A home visit allows the teacher to see what the child sees, to hear what the child hears, to smell what the child smells, to sit where the child sits, and the like. It is easier for a teacher to understand why a child can't get rid of head lice after seeing the animal that lives in the child's home; it is easier to understand why a child uses frequent profanity after conversing with his parents for half an hour; it is easier for a teacher to understand why a child cannot keep a desk clean after sitting in the living room in which he lives; it is easier for the teacher to empathize with a child who has smelly clothes after checking on the cigarette smoke in his home; and it is easier for the teacher to understand why the child can wear a different outfit to school every day after leaving the mansion in which he lives and by which two Rolls-Royces are always parked. Home visits help teachers understand what a child understands and the way he understands it.

by David Mansigel
Children Need Christian School Teachers

Once teachers understand how a child perceives his world, they can begin working with the child to help him understand that he is a special child of God and a worthwhile human being. Recent statistics show that when children enter first grade 80% of them have positive self-esteem. Shocking as it may sound, by the time children reach the fifth grade the number of children having positive self-esteem has dropped to 50%, and by the time they are in high school the figure has dropped to zero. These facts are scary. Is it any wonder that drug abuse, teen-age pregnancy, alcohol abuse, and teen-age suicide are on the rise? For some reason children have gotten the idea that they are not worthwhile human beings created by God. This must change, and Lutheran schools can be a good change agent.

Lutheran schools can offer all of the traditional secular subjects in a Christ-centered, Gospel-storm atmosphere. Lutheran educators, unlike public school educators, have the opportunity and privilege to daily share the news that God has forgiven everyone and that there is nothing anyone has done that can cause separation from God. Children can be made to feel their importance to this world and God’s love for them in this world. Everyday that a child is in a Lutheran school he can be assured of the fact that Jesus loves him and died for him. Everyday that he is in a Lutheran classroom he can see the model of a Christian teacher and become a reflection of that model in his life.

Lutheran educators are “alive.” That means they are “full of life.” They are willing to go the extra mile to ensure that every child in each classroom feels special. Attestations are made by the life-filled educators to having learning situations that are intriguing to all students. An alert educator will know the needs and interests of all his students and will provide for those strengths and weaknesses in rewarding ways.

Our midwestern Lutheran school has an elementary faculty that weekly marks the successes of all the children in the elementary department. Each elementary teacher evaluates the kind and quality of progress of each child and makes note of at least one way in which each child was successful. If a teacher cannot think of successes a child is having, the matter is discussed with the principal and a course of action is formulated which will usually involve the parents in at least a telephone conversation. In the same vein, the junior high department meets weekly to discuss concerns about students. The faculty is concerned that each student emerge as a winner and plans strategies to assist in this goal. It is “little things” like success charts and bi-weekly evaluation meetings that help keep children in the perspective in which they should be kept.

How a Home and School Partnership Works

As stated earlier, in order for a school to adhere to the motto, “Children Are Our Business-Our Only Business,” it is tremendously important that it form a strong bond with the home and that the home and school become active partners in the education of children. Very often parents are uncertain how to help their children become worthwhile human beings. Parents need to be trained and/or helped in becoming partners with the school. The earlier parents become involved in their children’s elementary school activities, the better and longer the lasting results will be. A good time for a school to start assisting their parents in aiding their children is when the children are in kindergarten.

Our school has initiated a program this year entitled “Children Involved in School” (C.I.S.). This program is a four-part-in-service program for all kindergarten parents. Each part of the in-service is one hour in length and deals with a different phase of child development. Each in-service meeting is designed to give parents helpful hints and ideas for becoming partners with the school by reinforcing suggestions made with the developmental activities that are happening in the school.

The first in-service pointed out how children are “spinpoint images” of their parents. Values taught in a Christian day school can be undone in the home if the values there are weak and worldly. A strong Christian day school can help the parents see the importance of working together to instill strong Christian values in children who live in a world where values are deteriorating rapidly.

A second session taught parents the importance of communicating with their children. It taught them how to listen to their children.

A third session taught parents to understand that God didn’t place the same intellectual capacity in each child. Attention spans of children vary and make note of at least one way in which each child was successful. If a teacher cannot think of successes a child is having, the matter is discussed with the principal and a course of action is formulated which will usually involve the parents in at least a telephone conversation. In the same vein, the junior high department meets weekly to discuss concerns about students. The faculty is concerned that each student emerge as a winner and plans strategies to assist in this goal. It is “little things” like success charts and bi-weekly evaluation meetings that help keep children in the perspective in which they should be kept.

The Parent Partner Plan

A Lutheran school can also provide opportunities for parents to become partners with each other and to help their children pursue more growth in Christ. A new program just initiated by our School Board is called “Parent Partners.” The model for this program is the ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus combined some of the functions within his church and called his disciples to be Zechaeus to come out of the sycamore tree because Jesus wanted them to go to Zechaeus’ house for dinner (social). The Zechaeus Jesus taught some of the things from the tenor of the plan, work, it will be enlarged to eventually include all of the school families. This is another example of how Lutheran schools care in an “extended” way for the children of the school.

Lutheran Schools Open Mission Opportunities

Lutheran schools are not inexpensive. It is probably the Lutheran school that has the budget more than anything else in it. But, schools are a very valid and legitimate part of that budget. There is probably no other group that provides such an intensive ministry with any other group of people. This particular target group has the bushy of hearing about Jesus and His love for them five days a week. But not only do they learn about Jesus; they also learn how to tell others about Him. The children are taught to become little missionaries. There are numerous examples from parishes throughout Synod that could be shared about children of non-churched parents who have attended a Lutheran day school and have shared the Good News that was learned in school with their parish community. They have been able to become active members of the church. Many of our Lutheran teachers and pastors today are in those positions because they were motivated by the Good News they were taught and their love for their children. Teachers of Lutheran schools. Hundreds of Lutheran teachers all over our land can relate experiences about receiving letters from former students who are now members of the church. The teachers have often received in their lives situations because they could recall Scripture passages, Bible stories, hymns, prayers, and the like from their days in a Lutheran school.

The Lutheran school is a vital mission of the church today. It can provide children with a spiritual avenue that can produce a positive self-worth in children that will help them be a powerful witness for Christ throughout their entire lives. Just last week one of our junior high teachers asked a boy in a study hall whether his assignments done to respond to the phrase, “I am proud of...” This high school student wrote the following:

...being myself having the ability of running, swimming, cooking, skateboarding, piano playing and finding new synthesizer options every day. I am proud that I have fine art ability, brought from my dad. I am proud that I can manage money wisely and I can think before I do things. I am proud that I worship the supreme God and that I have the utmost faith in God. I am normally proud of having so much faith in God that I have absolutely no fear, whatsoever, of death. I am proud that I attend a school that is high in quality. I am proud that I have a synthesizer and that I can create various sounds and songs with this instrument. I am proud that I have extreme interest in New Wave music and of artists of quality music.”

This young man has attended our Lutheran school for nine years. He feels good about himself and knows that God is his Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. He has been the business of our school — our own business. I am proud and thankful that I am part of this very important and special business that is one means that has been created by God to share his love and forgiveness with the children of the world.
Who Says Youth Ministry Is a Must?

Several weeks ago a veteran director of Christian education (DCE) sent me a brochure which described his congregation’s ministry efforts with its young people. Highlighted on the cover was this statement: “Our goal is that youth will see that Christ forgives all sin, brings to life faith in God, and leads us to live out our faith, through fellowship, study, recreation, service, singing, and worship.”

At the bottom of the brochure’s cover page were these bold words “THIS IS A MUST!”

On the surface, few congregations, especially their paid staff, lay leaders, and parents with young people, would dispute this urgent claim. Yet consistent, caring and comprehensive ministry to young people necessitates extensive investment of manpower and money. When considering all of the needs of a congregation, is it a “must” that there be this kind of ministry to the 12-21 year-olds?

This article will examine why the “must” is so. Prior to doing that, the author will lay out some key perspectives related to youth ministry. Basic needs of young people will also be discussed and characteristics that help a ministry to with youth to be vital and meaningful will be reviewed. Some “hoped-for-outcomes” of such a ministry will also be described.

Since youth ministry happens in specific contexts, with specific people, the remainder of this article will focus on the efforts of one parish to answer the question, “who says youth ministry is a must?”

Parish Realities

Budget time had come again at Grace Lutheran Church. Micah Burke wondered if he had the energy for all the meetings, parking lot discussions, and phone calls that lay ahead. Even though he was in his second year of chairing the Youth Board, he still felt uncomfortable having to debate the merits of various church programs. Not only did he have to defend a youth budget of $8,200 but he was aware that there were some rumblings about how the Director of Christian Education’s salary had added considerably to the congregational outlay for youth ministry.

In some ways this year seemed like a re-run of last year. With ten weeks to go, projected congregational expenses exceeded income by $12,500. Various lay leaders, especially those on the finance committee, were already assuming their “dooom and gloom” posture. And the treasurer kind reminded him of “Do you really need all of the money you’ve asked for?”

Last year such reactions put Micah on edge. Not this year. With the help of Grace’s DCE he and the youth board had taken a very pro-active stance toward advocating for youth ministry. Therein lay Micah’s major discovery as a board chairman, namely, if congregational members and leaders were expected to be supportive of youth ministry, they needed to be educated regarding its vision and goals and given a consistent up-date on what had been happening to and with young people through their various activities and programs.

Developing a Team

Another discovery that Micah had made as chairman was that effective ministry to youth happened through the joint efforts of both youth and adults. Just this past year the youth ministry team had finally jelled. It was composed of the following five inter-linking mutually supportive groups:

Youth Board: Five adults elected in the annual voters assembly to serve with four young people (two from the high school group and one each from the junior high and young singles group) whose major responsibility was to give direction to the overall ministry, decide policy questions, develop and implement a budget.

Program Planning Team: Elected representatives from grades 7 through 12 plus the youth counselors and the DCE whose major task was the actual planning and carrying out of the activities, events, and programs that composed Grace’s youth ministry efforts.

Youth Counselors: Selected adults were trained to support young people in carrying out their activities, events, and programs and to develop caring relationships with individual people.

Parent Council: Parents selected from the various age groups who periodically met with the youth board chairman, DCE, and counselors to share ideas, information, and concerns.

Youth Ministry Advocates: A network of parish members, none of whom had current program responsibilities in youth ministry, who were willing to 1) minister one-to-one with a selected young person; and 2) speak on behalf of youth ministry activities, projects, and programs amongst other adults.

After some “trial and error,” Micah found that these five “members of the team” groups functioned best where there was an ample amount of coordination, cooperation, communication, and common vision happening within the teams. He also discovered that a dependable vehicle for strengthening these kinds of behaviors was a well-designed retreat.

Laying the Foundation

Even though it had been a minor miracle to find a workable date for the Youth Board and Program Planning Team, the outcomes of their first weekend retreat were well worth the effort. Besides building a sense of community among those who retreated, the ad hoc retreat committee had identified three other hoped-for-outcomes:

1) Development of a youth ministry mission statement;
2) Identification of the scope of Grace’s ministry to youth;
3) Re-establishing the means through which cooperation, coordination, and communication would take place.

Micah hadn’t realized how ambitious the retreat committee’s goals were until after he had gotten home on Sunday evening. He also was profoundly grateful that they had invited a neighboring parochial school principal to be their retreat facilitator, and that they had asked their pastor to lead them through a study of Romans 12 as a basis for developing their mission statement.

After four revisions, the MISSION STATEMENT that was agreed upon for the coming year was:

In view of God’s mercy in Jesus Christ, we – youth and adults – seek to be transformed by God’s Spirit into living sacrifices, always maintaining a realistic picture of who God has made us, that our congregation’s youth ministry may build up the entire Body of Christ within our parish and beyond as we share our grace-given gifts through various worship, outreach, recreation, service, fellowship, and educational activities.

Building off of this mission statement, the SCOPE of Grace’s ministry to its youth presented another challenge. What helped to shape people’s thinking were two questions and a third that was asked by the DCE mixed: 1) What are the distinctive characteristics of Grace’s youth ministry? and 2) What needs of youth is Grace’s ministry attempting to fulfill?
The first question generated lots of discussion which finally was crystallized by a section of a book that the DCE had brought along as a resource. Grace's youth ministry was to be characterized by its being:

Person-centered: providing various activities and programs through which young people could be heard, known, and understood;

Team-centered: linking together youth and adults of different ages and abilities to achieve common goals;

Context-centered: providing events and classes that prepare youth to live their faith now and in the future;

Christ-centered: maintaining a focus on Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life regardless of the type of activity or project.

The second question focused upon an acronym—AFFIRM—implying that Merton and Irene Strommen had developed to describe the needs of young people in Firecries of Parents. By expanding on their concept the group identified the following twelve basic needs of youth—AFFIRMATIONS—and twelve goals to meet those needs during the coming year:

Achievement: The satisfaction of arriving at excellence in some area of endeavor.

Goal 1 To publicly recognize achievements of youth in the various newsletter groups (church, parent, and youth) and through the youth bulletin board.

Goals 2 To offer youth group functions which provide activities that help people get to know each other.

Friends: The development of one's capacity to make friends and maintain them.

Feelings: The self-understanding gained from having learned both to share one's feelings and to respond to another's feelings.

Goal 3 To provide young people with the chance to participate in the PEER training program.

Identity: The sense of knowing "who I am" and of being able to describe one's individual talents and gifts.

Goal 4 To offer a six-week Bible class study on "Gifts of the Spirit."

Responsibility: The confidence of knowing "On my own, I can make decisions and follow through on them."

Goal 5 To give young people significant responsibility for planning and carrying through their own activities.

Maturity: The recognition that one is becoming an adult.

Goal 6 To hold special celebrations for "rites of passage" such as confirmation and junior and senior graduation.

Adult Models: The experience of relating to caring adults who genuinely live out their Christian faith.

Goal 7 To continue having youth-adult "fun nights" involving recreation, worship, music, and drama.

Training: The strengthening of one's capacity to understand the Scripture and use it as the source and norm of faith.

Goal 8 To initiate a Breakfast Bible Study which emphasizes key scriptural promises.

Inspiration: The joy of participating in worship experiences that uplift and provide direction.

Goal 9 To take the "Joyful Noise" prayer and praise group on a spring break tour.

Outreach: The reaching out to others in spiritual, physical, social, or emotional need.

Goal 10 To participate in one of the synod's "servant events" this summer.

New Experience: The exploring of new ways to learn, grow, and simply enjoy God's work.

Goal 11 To make a special effort at keeping youth events creative, fun, and pressure free.

Sexuality: The acceptance of responsibility for one's new role as a sexual being.

Goal 12 To offer seminars on sexuality for youth and for their parents.

Meeting
But, as everyone at the retreat acknowledged, the real challenge ahead was to do all of the ministry captured in the goals, and to educate the congregation regarding the importance of what the Board was trying to do.

Raising the Awareness Regarding Youth Ministry
Following the retreat, there was considerable discussion among youth board members regarding how best to begin to systematically educate the congregation regarding its ministry to and with young people. The consensus was to:

1. Inform "word of mouth" sharing; spreading the word among adults that "good things" were happening in youth ministry;

2. Youth involvement in parish life: helping young people make their special contributions to the worship, social ministry, education, and evangelism activities of the parish.

3. Media resources: developing brochures, bulletin boards, newsletters, and other printed resources which raised awareness and provoked thought regarding youth ministry.

4. "Official" reports: having the Youth Board chairman and DCE report to various groups, boards, councils, and voter assemblies which clearly described youth ministry activities.

All of the approaches, the Youth Board invested most of its energy in identifying and developing thought-provoking resources that, on alternating months, could appear in the church newsletter and in the Sunday morning bulletin. For example, the first one focused on helping people feel "good" about Grace's ministry to and with its youth.

How Does Grace's Ministry impact Its Youth Rate?

Below are twelve characteristics of a "healthy church in youth ministry," according to some "diagnostic guidelines." Grace is doing 11 of the 12. Praise God! This congregation:

1. Understands youth ministry as part of the parish's ministry of Word and Sacrament and not as "an organization."

2. Established a board responsible to the parish church council (or board of directors) for regular youth ministry planning.

3. Provides, through that board, a ministry to grades 6-8, 9-12, and young singles.

4. Provides, in that youth board, equal representation of youth and adults.

5. Through that youth board plans a balanced, varied program of youth ministry activities that focus upon youth's need, concerns, and questions.

6. Uses short term "mountain top" events—gatherings, retreats, lock-ins, servant events, and trips — to strengthen the ties that bind individuals into the group.

7. Attempts to support the ministry of parents to and with their youth, rather than compete with them.

8. Is sensitive to the need for meaningful worship in the life of the parish which meets the needs of young people and young singles.

9. Seeks to provide channels for youth input and involvement in the life of the congregation, e.g., high school input through the board of youth ministry in parish issues.

10. Systematically identifies, recruits, trains, and supports adult volunteers to work with young people.

11. Understands youth ministry as a partnership between youth and adults designed to build up the entire Body of Christ rather than a churchly chance for young people to do their own thing.

12. Provides adequate budgetary support for a program of youth ministry through the congregation's budget.

The Youth Board's efforts to educate the congregation regarding its ministry to young people did not go unnoticed. The congregational treasurer wanted Mikeah to explain where he was going to get the money to cover the increased printing expenses. Lots of parents expressed appreciation for their thought-provoking and informative newsletter. The church secretary pleaded for some help running off and stuffing the bulletin inserts.

Perhaps one of the most telling signs that congregational members were growing in their appreciation of the need for youth ministry was a comment made by the chairman of the Board of Elders. He said that a number of people had sug-
Who Says Youth Ministry Is a Must?

As the voters assembly convened, Micah felt lots of pressure and supportive intensified after his youth report board received a positive reception.

The budget discussion that followed wasn't as pleasant. The finance committee was cut in force and was forced to ask questions regarding various line items in the proposed budget. When the youth board figures were presented, Micah saw it not as the treasurer introduced them with these words, "Now there's been lots of positive PR for our youth ministry this year. And that's good. But we've got to be realistic. We aren't meeting our financial commitments. So that says youth ministry is a must, especially to the tune of $8,800 plus what it takes to salary a DCE.

In retrospect, Micah couldn't have asked for a better opportunity to test the congregation's commitment to youth ministry. Although he couldn't remember all of what was said, he and Joan were able to piece together a number of the reactions to the treasurer's question.

Jake Hull, teen-age parent: "We're nowhere at Grace. Fraske, we didn't just care because our parent had a relationship, and that's true. We have two teenagers and two more getting close. We've already made our project for our church that cared about our teenagers. Our two boys like it here. Driving 32 miles to church is worth it for us if our kids can receive sound Christian teaching.

Bill Poppe, Evangelsism Board chairman: "Our committee has been studying..."Closing the Back Door..."and..." and that's what more of our kids are barreled up on options. It's like they're going up in a moomph super market with a million items in stock. We need to help our youth during these formative years because the choices they make can determine the shape of their lives for many years to come.

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book reviews


Many times in counseling with young adults, the litany of many difficult and disappointing dialogues begins with the refrain, "You're, it's your parents..." The sentence can continue and conclude with many different problems, but the young people's struggles have a similar starting point. How can young adults who love their parents and conscientiously want to honor and respect them be so angry and critical? Are they just being awkward or is there something more to it? Are they just being twenty-some, or is there more to their struggle with their parents?

Harold Ivan Smith addresses this dilemma in his latest effort, YOU & YOUR PARENTS. This prolific author, known especially for his writing on marriage and divorce issues, has compiled this volume entitled, "Strategies For Building An Adult Relationship," and his work is chockful of practical advice and enables adult sons and daughters to develop deep, meaningful relationships with their parents. His work is commendable in that he addresses these sensitive issues both with a concern for parents and with compassion for their "adult" children. Hopefully, this approach will effect a reconciliation which unites all parties. This is refreshing since some of the literature produced by "adult children" bitterly and vindictively denounces parents in order to escape conflitual relationships. On the contrary, Smith's reference to his relationships with parents, especially his father, is respectful and meaningful, and yet also honest and fresh.

Smith offers ten guidelines for sons and daughters who desire a relationship with their parents which allows for dignity and integrity for both. By sampling these guidelines shows that his approach is basically sound assertions which avoids wishful thinking. For instance, the first task noted for "adult children" is to "choose to be a son or a daughter." This is to be accomplished by another task, namely, to accept your parents as your "parents." In both of these strategies, Smith calls for a realistic recognition of the relationship as it is and for accepting personal responsibility to maintain and/or improve it. Obstacles to be removed along the way include perceived parental injustices and negative memories which now constist their lives. These are small, black, but Smith helpfully includes step by step strategies to work toward overcoming the barriers and to build a positive relationship.

Perhaps, the finest recommendation for this book stems from the generous application of Scriptural examples and models. Jesus was an adult son who dealt positively with his parents, even when they wanted to control Him (Mark 3:21, 31, 35). Still another model, and perhaps one that more closely resembles the conflitual relationships with which we are more familiar, is that of Jonathan and his father, Saul. Jonathan struggled to love and honor his father even as he was being used to betray his best friend, David. In a well-informed study, Smith appropriately illustrates many of his guidelines for boundary setting, rejecting harmful parental reasons, and maintaining close relationships through using these and other Bible references.

"This book is a powerful resource concerned to every adult son or daughter whose intentions to love and honor parents with integrity and freedom. It is a "how to" book. It is a practical advice which may annoy those who are looking for a defense against conflictual relationships, and for more insights from developmental psychology and sociology for understanding, and for more insights from developmental psychology and sociology for understanding the complex dynamics of the family. It is not a "how to" book which is little more than the " prioritize items of adulthood...not marriage, but renegotiating the parental relationship." I suggest that this reference is a great starting point in the renegotiation process. Richard C. Pfister


William Puris is the author of several books and articles focusing on television and religious organizations. He is currently a research associate in the Communication Council of Churches Media Program of the Church World Service, which promotes the use of the electronic church to local parishes.

In his present work, Mr. Puris recognizes the impact television has on our lives and indicates in his opinion, that the minister is the one well prepared to cope with it. In his reference to television, he says, "The Technics," he notes, "are not to be feared, but there is a need to be recommended to their membership that they not be afraid of the "new media" and furthermore that the church should become active against the culture.

Some churches join the television scene, often employing some of the same methodology as secular television. He calls these religious bodies the "Culture of culture.

His response to these premises is to offer another possibility. The possibility of "Christ and culture in partnership" or "Christ transforming culture." It is to this end that this book was written, and the remainder of the book deals with how this might be accomplished.

This leads to a theology of communication. This is the key concept, says Mr. Puris, that Christ is the one who accepts the premise, that it is possible to proactively accept the premise.

I found the fourth chapter particularly enlightening since Mr. Puris contrasts the great theories of scientists — e.g., creation, the fall, the covenant promise, the kingdom of God and the world, and the cultural mandate — with the way programs portray their worlds and the world in television. He proposes that Christians must decide how they wish to portray their worlds and the worlds they view on television.

Mr. Puris argues that religion would be complete without a look at the "electronic church." Mr. Puris has written often about this trend, especially the role of the television pastor who accepts the premise, then it is possible to proactively accept the premise.

Puris offers suggestions to the mainline churches to hold onto television in their ministries. He explores other areas as narrow or secondary.

The book closes with a Chapter entitled "Signs of Hope." Indeed, Mr. Puris offers signs of hope to those in the religious community who seek to understand how to make television the medium that could be used to share the gospel and make people realize the great Scriptural truths listed below.

The most important is that the reader is interested in television as a medium for religious communication. "Wise" is a good term for the book for a moral education class. It is most readable and, as always, Puris presents an interest and wealth of information on the topic.

Ray Hunsicker

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After the voters assembly adjourned, Micah had mixed feelings. He still didn't like meetings that debated the merits of various church programs, yet he was glad that the congregation affirmed their monetary commitment to youth ministry. Word would quickly spread among the young people that the adults of the parish had demonstrated again that they cared about them in a tangible way. What was sobering to Micah though was that all age groups within Grace congregation deserved consistent, caring, and comprehensive ministry. He was just grateful that he could contribute to the well-being of Grace's teenagers and hopefully, if the Youth Board's mission statement was true, that such efforts would benefit the entire congregation not only today but in the years to come. And who knows, maybe there will be a young person so touched that he or she will some day chair a Youth Board.

1 The brochure was developed by a very gifted DCE named Harlen Teske, currently serving Trinity Lutheran Church, Jefferson City, Missouri.

2 As Lyle Schaller has suggested in his book, Activating the Passive, Nashville; Abingdon Press, 1981, pp. 17-19, there are all sorts of special dynamics that exist in small, middle-size, and large churches. Rather than attempt to speak generally about youth ministry in a variety of parishes, the author has chosen to describe the efforts of a middle-size parish (670 members, including 67 young single, 73 high schoolers, and a 117 student K-8 parochial school).

3 Another helpful, but slightly different, “team” structure can be found in Involving Youth in Youth Ministry by Tom and Joni Schultz, Group Books, Loveland, Colorado, 1987.

4 An outstanding resource for training adults to be advocates is the Advoc- kit Manual: A Resource for Developing Advocates for Young People, the Board for Youth Services of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1983 Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO, 1983.

5 Mike Yaconelli and Jim Burns, High School Business, Youth Specialties, Grand Rapids: Zondervon, 1986, pp. 105-112.

6 The acronym in this article is an adaptation and expansion of the Stro- mens’ material found in their well received resource for people who work with youth and families, Irene and Merton Strommen, Five Cries of Parents, New York: Harper and Row, 1983, pp. 35-54.


8 These “healthy characteristics” are an adaptation and blending of a Northern Illinois District resource entitled “Characteristics of the Healthy Church in Youth Ministry” and Lyle Schaller’s characteristics of a thriving youth ministry, Survival Tactics in the Parish, Nashville: Abingdon, 1973, pp. 152-154.

9 Alan F. Harre, Closing the Back Door, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1988, p. 17.