

KEEPING TEENAGERS CONNECTED TO  
CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

BY

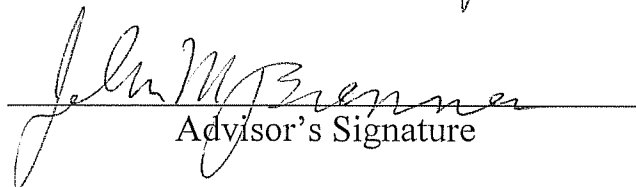
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A Senior Thesis Submitted to  
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Master of Divinity degree

Professor John M. Brenner, Advisor

Approved at Mequon, Wisconsin, on April 10, 2012

  
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## ABSTRACT

Every year in the United States countless teenagers promise to remain faithful to Christ and his Church on their confirmation day only to be never heard from again. The Wisconsin Synod is not immune to these tendencies either. Over the years there have been various suggestions of ways to stop this cycle. The purpose of this paper is to take what other respected people have studied and written concerning teenagers and their reasons for leaving churches and applying that to our situation in WELS. To do this we researched resources from a wide variety of Christian denominations as well as surveying numerous pastors within our fellowship. After sifting through the literature, articles, and surveys we have come up with some theoretical as well as practical ideas to keeping teenagers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century connected to Christ and his Church.

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## INTRODUCTION

As students preparing for the full-time gospel ministry, we strive to follow Jesus' commission to extend God's kingdom: "*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*"<sup>1</sup> We go forth to serve God by offering people the living water of his Word which will make them thirst no more.<sup>2</sup> Yet as we go forth eager to recruit new converts for the one true faith, we do not want to neglect our brothers and sisters presently in the faith. Many within our Christian family are hurting and suffering—some of whom we may not even be aware. God implores us to help his beloved children, our spiritual brothers and sisters, by encouraging them in their lives of faith. John summarizes how we can carry out God's will to serve fellow Christians: "*This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.*"<sup>3</sup>

In this project, we looked for ways to reach out to teenagers living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We wanted to get a better understanding of today's teenagers, how to relate to them, and how to minister to them. We are specifically interested in teenagers who are members of our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) congregations. Through our study and surveys we discovered vital insights into the roles teenagers play in the mission of the church. We used sources from outside WELS along with WELS resources to gather information. A major part of our study entailed contacting and surveying random pastors from WELS congregations who have the privilege and responsibility of ministering to teenagers on a regular basis.<sup>4</sup> We wanted to get information, suggestions, and ideas from men who have done a lot of work with youth ministry, as well as from men who have less experience. We also wanted to get input from a variety of different sized congregations so that our research could be as exhaustive as possible. Our overall purpose for writing this entire paper was our desire to reach teenagers with the gospel message; to strive to keep them connected to Christ and his Church. In this paper we will demonstrate how

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 28:19

<sup>2</sup> John 4:13

<sup>3</sup> 1 John 3:16-19

<sup>4</sup> Many of our insights and suggestions come from the thoughtful responses we got from these dedicated men. Throughout the paper you will see us referencing what they wrote. In the appendix to our paper, we post all the survey responses so you can read the information in full detail for yourself.

to keep teenagers connected to Christ and his Church by using the means of grace, by building meaningful relationships with them, and by providing them with opportunities to serve.

As we continued to gather more information we decided to divide the paper into different headings. In these headings we came up with ideas and suggestions for congregations and pastors who work with the youth. In the appendix of our paper we offer ten suggestions to summarize the things we learned about keeping teenagers connected to Christ and his Church. These summary suggestions offer pastors some practical things to think about as they strive to serve and support the teenagers whom God has placed in their congregations.

### **Diverse Ministry of a Pastor**

Before we can focus on ministering to teenagers, it is important to recognize the many other duties of pastors serving in the full-time ministry. A member at my vicar church stated, “Pastors really have to wear many hats, they are expected to be a jack of all trades.” We really have to be able to serve in a variety of areas. Pastors have to be able to teach and preach, above all else. We have to be able to counsel people while they suffer through the worst times of their lives: family strife and the death of loved ones. However, we also have the privilege to experience the greatest joys of people’s lives: when a man and a woman are united in marriage or when a child is adopted into God’s kingdom through Baptism. Today’s pastor needs to be able to handle a wide variety of things in his ministry.

In order to properly serve God’s flock as loving shepherds we have to be able to communicate with a wide range of people. Just as public ministers need to be ready for many different situations that occur in the lives of our members, it is also of utmost importance that we are able to work with and relate to people no matter their ethnicity, background, social status, or age. No doubt there are plenty of hats to wear in serving the diverse people of God’s kingdom.

The ministry can be a daunting occupation as we realize all of the duties involved and the vast audiences to which we want to communicate. Therefore, the temptation arises to ignore a certain group and focus on the people with which we feel more comfortable because they share our individual interests. One area of ministry that should not be neglected, no matter how much time and effort it takes, is ministering to the youth of the church. Certainly the children of the church are vital for the well-being of the church since they are the future leaders of the church militant. As we carry out our individual ministries we attempt to follow Jesus’ own words. “*Let*

*the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”*<sup>5</sup>

God’s grace is meant for all people, both young and old. These children need the forgiveness that Jesus won on the cross just as much as the older members in our congregations. It is crucial that we train up the next generation in the Word of God. Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection paid for their sins too. They need to be reminded of the grace won for them in Christ. As pastors and leaders in the church, we can help the youth better understand the value of God’s Word. Certainly it is important for the youth to receive the basic Catechism instruction, however, that should not be the end of their studies. Mature Christians should remind the youth to hold on to the truths of Scripture which they learned in Sunday school and Catechism class and live those truths in their daily lives. As faithful and caring leaders, we can help them better appreciate how amazing are the words of the Apostle’s or Nicene Creed! <sup>6</sup> We can help them see that the baby born in Bethlehem was the God-man who came to live, die, and rise to take away the sins of the world. We can help them see that God has called them and made them his own through their baptisms. We can help them see the importance of being in God’s house and receiving the Means of Grace. All the while, our prayer is that their faith in Jesus is being strengthened and nourished so that they will be better equipped to boldly fight the Christian battle until they reach their faiths’ goal in heaven. Ken Davis re-enforced the goal of pastors and leaders among the youth: “If we truly believe ours is the greatest message in the world, and if we are convinced that the young people to whom we minister need to hear that message, then we must strive for excellence at every step in the preparation and delivery of that message.”<sup>7</sup> Davis’ point is clear; we are dealing with something more important than any issue we may face on earth—we are dealing with eternal life! Therefore, it is imperative that we give full effort in communicating the gospel truth to the youth, so they too may see by faith the glory Jesus won for them!

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 19:14

<sup>6</sup> Carol E. Lytch, “The role of parents in anchoring teens in Christian faith,” (*Journal Of Family Ministry* vol. 19, no. 1:30-37. 2005. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost*), 32,33.

<sup>7</sup> Ken Davis, *How to Speak to Youth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 37.

## WORKING WITH TEENAGERS

So why do churches make such a big deal about youth ministry? Why do we spend hours upon hours working with the youth? It all begins and ends with the good news our God has given us. Our goals are the same as Jesus' goals "*who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*"<sup>8</sup> Knowing the peace and comfort Jesus' sacrifice brings, Christian leaders yearn to bring this same peace to the youth. We want them to spend all eternity with us in heaven, so we do everything we can to make sure they get there. We know that during this stage of their lives they will make decisions that will have lasting effects. These years are critical to ground them in, and fill them with Jesus' love and forgiveness.

When it comes to working with teen ministry, it is sometimes difficult to know where to start. There are so many things you could do, so many different approaches out there. It seems like nearly every person you ask has his or her own opinion about what is the best plan of action. But as you read through more and more books on the subject, it often becomes apparent that something is frequently overlooked in all these plans. Sadly the power of God, given to us in his means of grace, is pushed to the back of the book or left out completely. It should not surprise us that this is the case. Every person has that sinful nature that wants to look inside themselves for the answers and solutions. It is natural for people to want to put their future into their own hands. As a result of this disappointing reality, God and his Word are nowhere to be found.

Fortunately, being connected to Christ does not depend on our ability. Our natural instinct makes us want to concentrate on how hard we hold on to Christ, placing emphasis on our ability rather than how hard Christ holds on to us. The same is true when it comes to keeping teenagers connected to Christ. Without God working through his word, our best efforts and well-envisioned plans will be of no value. Without the working of the Holy Spirit, through the means of grace, every human being would still be lost in sin.

<sup>1</sup> As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup> in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup> All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. <sup>4</sup> But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. <sup>6</sup> And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> in order that in the

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<sup>8</sup> 1 Timothy 2:4



coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.<sup>9</sup>

Paul reminds us how God brought us from spiritual death to life. It was all God's working and none of our own. We are now spiritually alive only because of God's grace. That is the beauty of the gospel. It is only this powerful gospel message that works faith in a person's heart and connects them to Christ.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, we need to make sure that we keep this message front and center whenever we talk about keeping people connected to Christ.

As we focus on connecting people to Christ, the teenage audience can be a forgotten group, a group that is placed on the back burner of the pastor's planner. Pastors sometimes are apprehensive about working with young people because are more difficult to communicate with.<sup>11</sup> While adults can relate with wide age group of people, teenagers only have a small percentage of society with which they can relate. Teenagers dress differently than adults. They have interests the rest of the church may not understand or care to understand. They at times portray an attitude that is intimidating or disrespectful. They listen to the "wrong" type of music. They watch the "wrong" types of movies and shows. Often teenagers are viewed as just being disruptive or harmful to the church's overall harmony.<sup>12</sup>

Sadly, it can be easy for adults to pin these stereotypes on teenagers, since this is how media and social entertainment portrays teens. Movies often depict teenagers as anti-authority by showing them quarrelling with parents, teachers, and others in authority. They hear how morally wrong the messages can be in the music that is advertized to young people. Some people make generalizations about teenagers based on these portrayals depicted by the media. People can conjure up a false image of teenagers simply by what they read or hear, while failing to personally meet and get to know them as individuals. Quite frankly, teenagers are an oft neglected group because of their unique differences as we fail to give them the due care and love they need as God's people.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 2:1-7

<sup>10</sup> Romans 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

<sup>11</sup> Pastor #9 To keep the confidentiality of the participants we will only use numbers to cite their quotes.

<sup>12</sup> We are not saying these statements are true, but rather that these are thoughts that our sinful nature tries to use to impede God's work amongst them.

<sup>13</sup> Davis, 26.

## **What makes Teenagers Unique?**

In our study and research one common theme continued to arise: coming up with a specific generality for a given teenager is virtually impossible. Teenagers are very diverse. They have their individual uniqueness like any other person. In fact, their unique personalities are very hard to categorize because teenagers hate routine. They rather love the unpredictable, ever-changing pace of their life. When experiences become too routine or predictable, this is when life becomes boring or meaningless.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, there are important and common elements teenagers feel must be incorporated into their experiences of life. Relationships are the first component which is vital for a teenager. Relationships with family members are important for young people; however, relationships with friends far outweigh teenagers' relationship with their parents.<sup>15</sup> Best-selling author George Barna surveyed and interviewed thousands of teenagers across America. The information he gathered is still recent<sup>16</sup> and applicable for understanding teens today. Barna explains what he discovered regarding the connection teens have with one another.

Relationally, teenagers strive to have a serious connection with both family and friends every day. Most of them succeed. In a typical day, 96 percent of teens will spend some free time with friends. How interesting and revealing it is to discover that they are more likely to have a meaningful conversation with their friends during a typical day than they are to have such interaction with either their mother (70 percent do so) or their father (53 percent).<sup>17</sup>

This information may be discouraging for parents, but this is the reality of teenagers. They feel more comfortable talking with someone who possesses similar interests; someone closer to their age; someone going through the same experiences they are going through; and someone who can sympathize with their pains. Furthermore, as kids grow, mature, and become teenagers, they will encounter more people at school or the workplace where naturally they will develop more relationships.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> George Barna, *Real Teens* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2001), 25.

<sup>15</sup> Todd Hahn and David Verhaagen, *GenXers After God: Helping a Generation Pursue Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 146.

<sup>16</sup> The research he conducted is around a decade old at the time of the writing of this paper.

<sup>17</sup> Barna, 26.

<sup>18</sup> Kathleen Engebretson. "Young people, culture, and spirituality: some implications for ministry." (*Religious Education* vol. 98, no. 1: 5-25. 2003. *SocINDEX with Full Text*, EBSCOhost), 13,14.

Media is a big way in which teenagers stay connected to each other; it also is the second major element teenagers feel must be included into their experience of life. Today, media consumes the lives of teenagers. Research has concluded that teens spend around 7 hours a day online. During these 7 hours teens do a wide variety of things: playing games on their smart phones, sending and receiving instant messages, listening to music on iTunes, playing video games, watching videos, and surfing the internet. This doesn't include the gifted teenagers who have mastered the art of multitasking. For example, many check Facebook while listening to music, or they play video games while sending messages. This activity of performing different activities at one time should not be downplayed, but instead it should be admired and accepted by adults, acknowledging the unique abilities teenagers are blessed with.<sup>19</sup>

New technological inventions or advances also play a big factor in the life of many teenagers. Often people of this age group are very interested and educated in the most up-to-date technology which can range from video games to cell phones. For many young people the invention of new electronics has provided them with great ways not only to communicate with one another but also to help define their lifestyle.

### **How Teens are Different from Adults?**

Pastors and leaders looking to relate with young members of the church should take note of these interests. Just because things today are different than when we were growing up does not give us the excuse to be ignorant when young people in our church bring up the newest game they purchased for their X-box 360 or the newest application they downloaded for their iphone. Even though it may not be the most interesting topic for a pastor to discuss, the Apostle Paul gives clear instruction how to best conduct oneself among all people, even people different than me. *“To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.”*<sup>20</sup> “Become all things to all men.” I imagine the youth are considered among all men or people. Paul wanted to preach the gospel message to all people. He didn't change the message to make the point of Christ-crucified more meaningful for people. He, rather, made sure his personality and likes did not hinder or get into the way of the gospel. Paul's care for the souls

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<sup>19</sup> NYT.com

<sup>20</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:22

he was ministering to was his top priority: *“Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.”*<sup>21</sup>

Paul gives us a beautiful example of how God expects future ministers of the gospel to act. In order to connect and reach God’s people, pastors will have to connect with their members on a personal level. These relationships will show the loving nature of the pastor, and how he genuinely he cares for his members. In return, members will be more likely to come to their pastor, whom they know and like, with their sincere hurts and pains. They may also come to their pastor when they have committed a sin, looking for the sweet words of the gospel. Or perhaps they will have questions and concerns about what’s going on in their church and its ministry. People will be more comfortable approaching their pastor when they witness how caring and love he is.

This personal connection will be amplified with teenagers. As stated previously, relationships are very meaningful for the youth. Just because a pastor has been called to a position of authority in the congregation does not mean that he holds that authority over the teenagers. If he takes the time to show care and concern for the teenagers he serves, he also shows that he appreciates them. Making a point to interact with them, beyond the impersonal “how’s it going”, works wonders. More than likely, if you make an “investment” in them and show that they matter, the more likely you can take out a “deposit” on them. What I mean is that teens will likely want to participate in church activities and join youth events, if they see the pastor acting as a genuine shepherd who cares for them. “I also try to talk to them on a regular basis. This relationship with the pastor makes them feel like they matter, which leads them to want to volunteer for other things.”<sup>22</sup>

Clearly only the gospel motivates lives of sanctification but parents, pastors, and other adults in the church can encourage young people in their lives of sanctification. We can help young people live their faith, as we take an interest in them and support them.

### **What Attracts Teenagers to a Church?**

After dissecting the various personalities of teenagers, we see that teenagers can be quite complex. Not only do they differ from adults in a number of ways, most individual teens differ

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<sup>21</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:19

<sup>22</sup> Pastor #28

from each other. During these years of their lives they are not only going through physical changes but they also changes in the way they view the world. As a result of this, teenagers can be a difficult group to always understand. This also makes a pastor's job more difficult as he ponders the best ways to minister to them.

### **Power of God's Word**

Nevertheless, there is hope for the church in her effort to reach out to this unique generation. The devil is certainly hard at work on this impressionable group. He is always prowling around like a roaring lion trying to figure out how best to attack his prey.<sup>23</sup> Thankfully, our God is strong enough to help us overcome the temptations of the devil. He has given us his mighty Word which the devil cannot stand up to. God's Word is even able to penetrate the complex personalities of teenagers! We hear the writer of Hebrews describe this power: "*For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*"<sup>24</sup> This is remarkable news for pastors and leaders working with the youth. Even though we do not always say the right thing or handle every situation perfectly we are assured that God's Word still works wonders. God and his Word are powerful enough to act as he wills and wants even when we commit a big blunder.<sup>25</sup> We find our confidence and assurance in Jesus' promise to send the Holy Spirit, through the gospel message.<sup>26</sup> Jesus' promise is evident in youth-based ministry, where we see the power of God's Spirit working in people of any age.<sup>27</sup>

### **Meaningful Lives**

Like most people, teenagers want to know and make meaning of their life.<sup>28</sup> They want something bigger and more important than the mundane routine of everyday life, which so often is insignificant in the grand scheme of God's plan for people.<sup>29</sup> Young people have a hunger for

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<sup>23</sup> 1 Peter 5:8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

<sup>24</sup> Hebrews 4:12

<sup>25</sup> Jimmy Long (coordinator), *Small Group Leaders' Handbook: The Next Generation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 54,55.

<sup>26</sup> John 14:15,16 If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever.

<sup>27</sup> Thom and Joani Schultz, *Involving Youth in Youth Ministry* (Loveland, CO: Group Books. Loveland, 1987), 29.

<sup>28</sup> Pastor #10

<sup>29</sup> Lytch, "The role...", 32.

connection, to be in relationships to have a feeling of belonging.<sup>30</sup> We can attribute this desire to God. While some teens may not have spiritual parents or friends, God can make people wonder about his awesome power. The natural knowledge of God plays a role in helping the teen see that there is meaning and significance to life: *“For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”*<sup>31</sup>

### **Things that Deter Teenagers from Church**

We have touched on some of the obstacles that stand in the way of a teenager’s worship life. In a big way, media depicts religious people as an association with no grip on reality. Mass-media loves to degrade and ridicule Christians for their belief in God. Wherever we look, messages which clash with our beliefs are prevalent. If a Christian teenager tries to find inspiration in the media to go to church, they will be doing so in vain.

Nevertheless, the media’s false message about religion and God is very attractive to teenagers. It plays to their soft spot of “being their own person”: not being forced to listen to one specific decree or person (even if that person is God and the decree is his holy Word). The world will promote their dangerous propaganda to live opposite of Scripture. They downgrade certain doctrines such as chastity before marriage, respecting those in authority, and opposing the desires of the sinful nature. Battling the world and its enticing messages can seem like an upward battle for pastors, especially when we are trying to reach young people with the essential Word of God.<sup>32</sup> It does not seem to compare with the “cool” and “empowering” messages of this world which appease the sinful nature. During these difficult times God once again speaks to his servants and provides a reality check. God reminds pastors that they should expect opposition and struggles because this world opposed our Lord first. *“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.”*<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Robert J. McCarty. “What is Catholic Youth Ministry?” (*Human Development* vol. 29, no. 1: 20-22. Spring 2008. *Education Research Complete*, EBSCOhost), 13,14.

<sup>31</sup> Romans 1:20

<sup>32</sup> Pastor #31

<sup>33</sup> John 15:18, 19

## **Family Dynamics**

Family life is another factor which deters teens away from God and a regular church life. We have seen that faithful, Christian parents are inspirational for teens to come to church. However, if mothers or fathers are not strong in their faith, the kids will likely pick up that this is not a priority for their life.<sup>34</sup> Teenagers will glean that worship is unimportant and unnecessary by the example their parents portray.<sup>35</sup>

Sadly a main factor that contributes to parents' lack of Christian morals stems from the downfall of Christian marriage. Dysfunctional families are not rare occurrences anymore. There are more and more children with divorced parents or parents who have never been married. This abuse of marriage ignores the structure God lays out in Scripture for husband and wife.<sup>36</sup> As a result of ignoring God's blue-print for marriage, the family suffers. Spouses point fingers at one another, blaming each other for the failed marriage. Stress and arguments take place often around the house creating an unsettled family environment. Consequently, it is not just the adults that are hurt, but the kids and teenagers suffer from divorces as well.<sup>37</sup> They are left to pick up the pieces and are forced to cope without mom or dad in their lives everyday life. This plays a factor in their secular life as well as their religious life. Charles Learman's conference paper has an insightful point that pertains to this issue:

By word and by example Christian parents are to teach their children. The home is still a tremendous influence in the lives of children. When or if that home influence conflicts with the instruction of God's Word, then children can become exasperated and discouraged. When children learn from their parents that the means of grace, Word and Sacrament, and church have a low priority in their lives, how can we expect these confirmed children to have a different priority? When children see their parents living lives that run contrary to the instruction which they are learning from God's Word, isn't it only natural for them to be confused?<sup>38</sup>

An essential part of the problem which contributes to weak Christian families is the lack of the spiritual head. In the roles of marriage, God has set apart men as the heads of the household. They are responsible for the well-being of the family; making sure the family is

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<sup>34</sup> Charles L. Learman, *How Shall We Combat the Confirmation/Graduation Syndrome?* (WLS Essay Files, 1993), 3.

<sup>35</sup> Rev. Charles J. Keeler, *Serving Our Lutheran Youth: A Handbook for Lutheran Pastors and Youth Leaders* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod Board for Education and Youth, Youth Subcommittee, 199), 68.

<sup>36</sup> 1 Corinthians 7.

<sup>37</sup> Engebretson, 9.

<sup>38</sup> Learman, 7.

protected and nourished. Even more importantly, the head of the house is responsible for feeding his family with spiritual food. Husbands and fathers are implored by God to serve in this very important role. “*Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*”<sup>39</sup>

Martin Luther also felt passionate about the head of the house being involved in training children in Biblical truths. Luther even provides advice for fathers who may consider themselves unqualified. “It is therefore the duty of every family head to examine his children and household members at least once a week to see what they have learned of the Catechism. If they do not know it, he should insist earnestly that they keep working at it.”<sup>40</sup> If only more fathers today took this responsibility seriously and followed Luther’s directive! Christian training, at home, at a young age, is extremely important to prepare children for the future.<sup>41</sup> This training will provide children with solid foundations which can be built on during their teenage years. It also gives them a place to lean on and turn to when they face the temptations of this sinful world.

### **“Fault” of the Church**

Picture this scenario. A teenager has a great Christian home. A place where there is genuine love and care for each other as well as for God. The parents faithfully instruct the teenager in the ways of the Lord. The teenager has great Christian friends with which to surround himself. Everything looks to be in order to guard himself against the attacks of the devil. Unfortunately that does not guarantee that a teenager will thrive in a church. We have already stated the ways the devil tempts teenagers to sin, but what about the leaders of the church? The devil’s temptations do not exclude pastors and leaders of the church. He vehemently attacks these visible representatives in hopes of getting them to fall. He uses anyone and anything he can to try to stop the growth of God’s church by any means necessary. We can point the finger all we want at the youth we are working with, but servants of God need to evaluate their own work in youth ministry. How much time and effort do we truly devote to the youth of the church? Do we devote ourselves to minister to their needs and concerns? Or, do we fill our time with other things with which we feel more comfortable or seem easier. It is possible then for teenagers to feel forgotten or even unwelcomed. President Zarling of Martin Luther

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<sup>39</sup> Ephesians 6:4

<sup>40</sup> Martin Luther, *Large Catechism* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), 10.

<sup>41</sup> Pastor #13



College reflected these thoughts when he said, “At the other end of the spectrum is the tendency to pigeonhole the teen members into a third membership category. We have the baptized souls. We have the adult communicants. And then there are the teens.”<sup>42</sup>

### **Lack of Priority**

This world is ever-changing. Society is constantly coming up with new inventions which make headlines on a daily basis. America especially epitomizes this fast-paced society. People are busy with many activities, activities for both themselves and for their kids. Teens are incredibly busy with their high school life, employment, activities, and sports; little time is left to make church a priority. "The largest issue is teens perceive themselves to be so busy, they don't always have time for ministry in the formal church. And with all the sports/arts/jobs/etc., they are quite busy and they fail to prioritize service to God in their schedule."<sup>43</sup> This is another concern leaders of the church need to battle against. Busy schedules may be excuses teens use for not being active in the church, but that should not keep us from trying to reach these precious souls with God's Word and strive to keep them in the church.

## **KEEPING TEENS CONNECTED THROUGH THEIR HIGH SCHOOL YEARS**

### **Connected To Christ**

There is one more thing that we should be concerned about when we are discussing keeping teenagers connected to Christ: we make sure they are regularly and repeatedly hearing the Word and receiving Jesus' body and blood for the strengthening of their faith. And what better place is there to hear that gospel message than in God's house? As one pastor puts it,

Contact with Word and Sacrament is the only way to become and stay connected to Christ. The Divine Service is the only activity of parish life where Word and Sacrament are offered in one setting. So, we encourage teens to come to the Divine Service because it is the place and event where forgiveness is offered and in faith received.<sup>44</sup>

But the power of the means of grace should not be limited to that one hour block on Sunday morning during the worship service. This power is not limited to its uses only in a church

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<sup>42</sup> Mark G. Zarling, *Keeping Kids in the Kingdom* (WLS Essay Files, February 1999), 2,3.

<sup>43</sup> Pastor #27

<sup>44</sup> Pastor #7

building. God certainly does not forbid us from using his Word at other times and in other places of our lives. In fact, he does just the opposite. He encourages us, even pleads for us to be in his Word regularly and to hear it often. He desires for us to make it a part of our daily lives, to keep it in our hearts, and to keep it on our lips always.<sup>45</sup> For it is only these means of grace which strengthen our connection to him and bring us back to him. “The means of grace is going to keep these kids connected to the means of grace. We commit them to the Spirit's care and do our best to provide as many opportunities to hear the gospel and participate in Holy Communion.”<sup>46</sup> Therefore we should make it our goal to create opportunities for teenagers in our care to hear that word regularly and often. It could be in a teen Bible class on Sunday morning, during a devotion before you go on a ski trip, reading through the Christmas story at your Christmas party, or many other possibilities. But no matter where we are, or what event or activity we are doing, God’s Word should be a focal point because the Holy Spirit works through the Word each and every time it is proclaimed. “Wherever the word is sown and nurtured in the hearts of people the Holy Spirit is working to foster spiritual life and growth.”<sup>47</sup> When a pastor truly seeks to keep teenagers connected to Christ, he makes it his priority to delve deeper and deeper into the Scripture to show them how much their God loves them. A pastor will ensure that his message in the sermon is not directed only at the more mature Christians, but rather that it is understandable and applicable to people of all ages. A pastor remembers that his greatest tool in gospel ministry is simply that, the gospel. “The Word of God is the most important tool in our church's toolbox. If we use it and don't just talk about it, if we really take the time to teach and admonish, then sin is met with forgiveness, short-sightedness is met with aged wisdom and false pride is replaced with humility.”<sup>48</sup>

### **Connected to Christ’s Church**

God has certainly entrusted leaders in his church with an enormous task of bringing his means of grace to his people, but this task is also a blessed one as well. We have the privilege of feeding thirsty souls the good news of Christ crucified! Because of Jesus’ work, we are able to

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<sup>45</sup> Proverbs 22:17-19 Pay attention and listen to the sayings of the wise; apply your heart to what I teach, <sup>18</sup> for it is pleasing when you keep them in your heart and have all of them ready on your lips. <sup>19</sup> So that your trust may be in the LORD, I teach you today, even you.

<sup>46</sup> Pastor #24

<sup>47</sup> Pastor #17

<sup>48</sup> Pastor #23

forgive the sins of the penitent and point them to the cross. We can show people the empty tomb, assuring them that they too will rise from the dead. We have the privilege of giving them the comfort that only the gospel can bring at the death of a loved one. But God has also given us the calling to pass on these truths to the next generation. God requires pastors to serve, prepare, and guide the future leaders in his church. As Moses was nearing the end of his days as leader of Israelites he reminded them of these truths. These truths still apply today to those who care for and care about God's children. *“Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”*<sup>49</sup>

How do we best teach the next generation the word and deeds of the Lord? How do we give them every opportunity to hear his Word and receive the sacrament? How do ensure these little ones are and will be prepared when they have to stand before the judge on the last day? We keep these teenagers connected to the place where God's Word is taught. We keep them connected to fellow Christians who can support and encourage them. We keep them connected to role models who daily portray Christ's love and his will in their lives. We keep these teenagers connected to the body of believers in the church.

### **Influence of Parents and Family**

Some people have even bigger roles and bigger influences in keeping these teens connected to Christ's church. Some people have been given direct commands by God to serve as his representatives in the lives of these teens. The first and greatest responsibility for training the next generation does not fall on the shoulders of the church, the school, or even children themselves. God has chiefly given this responsibility to a child's own parents. God reminds parents that it is their job to take care of the needs for their children, both physical and spiritual. It is their job to care for the child and make decisions for their good.

Parents have been blessed with a special relationship with children that no one else has. Because they are the primary caregivers for the child, the child will likely look up to the parents and follow their lead. Teens learn their faith from the faith being modeled by their parents and the values and morals being portrayed by them as well as how much they value God and religion

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<sup>49</sup> Deuteronomy 11:18, 19

in their everyday life.<sup>50</sup> Leading researchers in the subject of youth ministry make the point that a parent's influence on a child has the potential to be much greater and longer lasting than that of any other person, including peers, pastors, or youth minister.<sup>51</sup> "Today, aware youth workers admit that their influence over adolescent pales compared to the parent.' If we are to maximize our ministry potential, we must find ways to help parents do their adolescent rearing."<sup>52</sup>

In our survey, nearly 75% of pastors saw the parents as the most influential and most critical people involved when it came to whether a certain teenager would remain connected to the church or not.<sup>53</sup> These men have had the opportunity to see first-hand what happens when a parent or both parents are not faithful in coming to worship or congregational activities. "When parents are active in worship and service in the congregation, teens often follow their lead. When the parents are in worship but not serving, the teens are less involved. If the parents are sporadic in worship, the teens are gone."<sup>54</sup> When parents are regular in church and show the importance of feeding their faith, this rubs off on their young son or daughter. Parents who make worship and church functions a priority make a lasting impression on the next generation.

In her research concerning high school age children and their connection to the church, Carol Lytch uncovered some interesting statistics.

Most of the high school seniors I interviewed who lived in homes with a church attendance requirement said that they went to church voluntarily anyway. The "polarization effect"<sup>55</sup> usually kicks in by the senior year of high school: the seventeen and eighteen year-olds reared in active church families become more religious; those reared in less religious homes tend to drift. Most high school seniors in my study who attended church weekly had internalized the practice of weekly church attendance and the understanding that part of weekend was Sabbath time.<sup>56</sup>

Obviously, setting the foundation for keeping children connected to Christ has to start long before they are in the high school years. If a child is taught the importance of church at a

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<sup>50</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean, "Faith, nice and easy: The almost-Christian formation of teens" (*Christian Century* vol. 127, no. 16: 22-23, 26-27. Aug. 10 2010. EBSCOhost.), 22.

<sup>51</sup> Barna, 72. In his research Barna found that more than 3 out of 4 teens (78%) acknowledged that their parents have a lot of impact on their thoughts and deeds. He also found that no other individual or group came close to this influence.

<sup>52</sup> Schultz, 38.

<sup>53</sup> When asked to answer this question, "Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?" 26 out of 36 pastors responded with parents as being number one.

<sup>54</sup> Pastor #3

<sup>55</sup> "polarization effect" Carol Lytch takes this phrase from Elizabeth Ozorak's Journal article "Social and Cognitive Influences on the Development of Religious Beliefs and Commitment in Adolescence".

Ozark uses this phrase to interpret her findings on adolescent religious socialization.

<sup>56</sup> Lytch, "The Role...", 33.

young age, this mentality would most likely stick with him even when he is afforded more freedom. If he regularly saw how important being in church and hearing God's Word meant to his parents in his younger years, he would most likely adopt this same mentality. It is not just showing up for Sunday morning church once a month that instills this thinking into teens; rather, parents must demonstrate how God and his Word are something that they care about and take with them each and every day of their lives. It starts in the home with spiritual exercises like devotions and prayers. Also, the interaction between parents and children and the words and actions that parents display to each other is very beneficial for young people to witness and mimic. The Christian foundation is exemplified when the parents automatically involve the entire family in the activities of the church and look for ways to serve and use their gifts to help out the body of believers. Parents must truly be filled with the love of Christ, and then reflect that love in what they say and do. This will have a lasting effect not only on how their children act, but also how they think. When parents do this, making the church and participating in the church a priority not only for themselves but also for their entire family, it not only strengthens the bonds of the family but also strengthens each individual's bond to Christ. "The greatest gift you can give to youth is parents who are in the Word. The greatest gift you can give the parents is time spent to instruct and nurture their kids in the Word. The two go hand in hand. But without parent support, it is extremely difficult to have a viable youth ministry."<sup>57</sup>

### **Influence of Pastors and Youth Leaders**

While parents have the most influential and critical role when it comes to participation in church, they are not the only ones who can affect a teenager's thinking. Pastors also have unique roles that they have been given by God as shepherds of the flock. They have been called by God and the congregation to be the spiritual leaders of that specific family of believers. As such they can influence not only the congregation, in general, but also the youth of the congregation by their words and actions. If a pastor is able to develop a deep bond with the children in his Catechism class, that relationship will influence them when they are no longer taking instruction from him.<sup>58</sup> If a pastor acts as if he has no concern or care for the youth or youth ministry, it will definitely have an effect on the teenagers' willingness to participate. If a pastor shows the youth

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<sup>57</sup> Pastor #16

<sup>58</sup> Pastor #17

that they are important, not only to Christ but also to him personally, it can have a lasting impression on them.<sup>59</sup> When a pastor takes time out of his busy schedule to stop and talk to one of his teenagers, or dedicates his Friday night to come and support them in their activities he is showing that these people matter to him.<sup>60</sup> If he takes a serious interest into their lives and their physical well-being the teenagers will be able to see that they are truly important to him; not just a number in his book of records.

This relationship that is developed between the pastor and the teenagers also allows him to talk to them about serious things going on in their lives as well as spiritual matters.<sup>61</sup> A pastor who has a good relationship with the teenagers will also more likely be called upon when something unexpected or difficult arises in the life of one of those teenagers. Teenagers will be more likely to stop and listen to encouragement and rebuke, if necessary, from a pastor whom they respect and trust. A healthy relationship with a pastor may also encourage those teenagers to consider following that pastor's footsteps and study for the full-time ministry.

A pastor's attitude toward the youth ministry can also affect the ministry in another way. When the pastor shows the importance of this ministry, not only to the students but also to the other members, they are more likely to follow his direction. A pastor has the opportunity to set the tone in the congregation by portraying an atmosphere of allowance and permission in view of the teenagers and youth ministry.<sup>62</sup> A pastor, who allows the teenagers to have freedom to assist in the ministry and mission of the church, can impact the way the congregation and even the teens view themselves in the church.

A lay youth leader can also be very significant in helping set up and run a good youth program.<sup>63</sup> This member of the congregation can serve as a good model of how a mature Christian is directed by God to live. This person can demonstrate that you do not just have to be a pastor or teacher to live your faith and use your gifts; rather, it is God's will for all the members of the body of Christ.<sup>64</sup> Lay leaders can also ease the load of a pastor by taking some

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<sup>59</sup> Pastor #28

<sup>60</sup> Pastor #12

<sup>61</sup> Pastor #17

<sup>62</sup> Pastor #24

<sup>63</sup> This very case happened where I vicared last year. Each year the vicar was in charge of the youth group, especially the spiritual aspects of it; however, there were also two mature lay leaders that kept consistency even when the vicar changed every year. This allowed the teenagers to know what to expect and made sure that the new vicar did not have to start at square one every year. Plus it gave me someone I could learn from and bounce ideas off of.

<sup>64</sup> Pastor #25

responsibility for the group on their shoulders. They may have a good grasp of what successful activities and projects were performed in past teen ministries, along with activities that were not successful among the youth. Strong lay leaders dedicated to working with the teenagers can be beneficial by providing consistency to the group in the case the pastor takes a call or retires. This stability also makes it easier for your teenagers to invite their classmates or friends to come and join the group.<sup>65</sup>

Sometimes the best way to help a teen or show care and concern for them is simply to listen. In a world where everyone wants to talk and be heard, what a benefit it is when someone shows interest in just listening to what is going on in their lives. An effective pastor or youth leader learns quickly that all people, especially teenagers, want to be heard and understood. Listening gives the pastor or youth leader the opportunity to understand them and what is going on in their lives, to counsel them with law and gospel if necessary, and to show Christian love to them.<sup>66</sup>

### **Building Bonds with Peers**

The teenage years are a unique and often rocky time in the life of people. Most teenagers no longer want to be considered children, yet they are not old enough or mature enough to be adults. The teenage years are filled with physical, emotional, psychological, and mental changes as well<sup>67</sup>. It is during this time of their lives that teenagers are looking for someone to trust. They also are beginning to look more and more to their peers for acceptance and direction in their lives. Knowing and understanding these factors can certainly affect how we plan or carry out youth ministry.

If we can get Christian teenagers to feel comfortable at church functions as well as build relationships with other teenagers, they will be more likely to show up to subsequent gatherings or activities. However, this can also have negative aspects if the teenagers who do show up do not get along with each other or are cold and unkind to one another.

If we're really honest about teens, you know how personalities can either help or hinder activity. If you have a core group who is open, inviting and inclusive, others will join in. They will want to be around each other. However, if you have those nasty cliques, or

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<sup>65</sup> Pastor #16

<sup>66</sup> Keeler, 23.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 19.

there is a feud between this person or that person, or that boy dumped that girl and so now she and her friends are not going to come.<sup>68</sup>

Another reason for emphasizing building healthy bonds between fellow teens is that it has both short term and long term benefits. One of the short term benefits of encouraging good relationships between the teenagers is that it helps them as they set their priorities.<sup>69</sup> If teenagers enjoy something and look forward to it they will schedule whatever they can around that event or activity.<sup>70</sup> If their friends are planning on coming they are much more likely to do everything in their power to come also.<sup>71</sup> One pastor put it this way, “The less active teens in the congregation do go along with their friends to other teen activities. The teens will go where their friends are. It is important for us that our teens bond with one another in the congregation so that they look forward to seeing each other at church.”<sup>72</sup> Another short term benefit of having strong relationships between the teens is the support they can provide to each other. In many cases, they will go through many of the same life experiences as they are surrounded by unchurched friends.<sup>73</sup> So if something happens in the life of one teenager he or she will have others to fall back on and lean on. That person will have the support of friends and fellow Christians who are able to relate to that individual more easily than an adult could. A longer term benefit of building these bonds early in life is that these teenagers will continue to grow up together. Their friendships and relationships will grow as they hang out together, serve together, and study God’s Word together.<sup>74</sup> If they can build close bonds while young, it increases the chances of them staying connected to each other and the church if something in life attempts to pry them away.

### **Building Bonds with Other Members**

Teenagers are not the only ones in the body of Christ, just as the elderly or the middle age are not the only ones in the body of Christ. The invisible Church is made up of believers from

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<sup>68</sup> Pastor #1

<sup>69</sup> Pastor #28

<sup>70</sup> Pastor #15

<sup>71</sup> Pastor #21

<sup>72</sup> Pastor #30

<sup>73</sup> Pastor #3

<sup>74</sup> Pastor #23



every nation, tribe, people and language.<sup>75</sup> The Apostle Paul reminds God's people that we cannot all be the same part or do the same thing; however, we all have a vital role and purpose. As members of that one body, it is important and necessary that we, the parts, work together. It is important that our congregations are not divided out into older members over here and younger over there. For in these situations the parts of the body are not working together but separate. Just like a body is not able to accomplish as much without all its parts, so it is within the body of Christ.<sup>76</sup>

Therefore, it's important that people from different generations are able to build mutually beneficial relationships. They need to see the benefit of working together and encouraging each other.<sup>77</sup> When this happens, the weaknesses that one group of people may possess can be overcome by the strengths of others. Often I have overheard an older member say, "If only I had the energy I could do so much more." Who has more energy and stamina than those in their teenage years? And yet, what good are energy and stamina if they are not accompanied by wisdom and understanding? Who has more wisdom and understanding than men and women who have led full lives and experienced the triumphs and challenges that life has to offer? A healthy church, like a healthy body, uses all of its talents.

Another reason for trying to develop good relationships between the teenagers and the older members in the congregation is to prepare the teenagers for the present and for the future. The more teenagers are trained and prepared for leadership roles in the church, the easier of a transition it will be as they are entrusted with more responsibilities.<sup>78</sup> If they can watch and learn from experienced members what a specific job or committee does it will be of great benefit to them in the future. When the teenagers and the older members of the congregation have quality relationships it can be extremely beneficial to both sides.

We feel it is a great advantage for the youth generation and the grandparent generation to interact with one another. We try hard to facilitate opportunities for this interaction, to great or lesser degrees of success. The older members have so much to offer the youth with regards to life experiences and just general interest. Generally, the elderly enjoy seeing children so much. And the youth, although initially tentative, have this natural way of breaking through the crusty exteriors and reaching the hearts of those elderly. It can be such a wonderful thing.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Revelation 7:9

<sup>76</sup> 1 Corinthians 12

<sup>77</sup> Pastor #6

<sup>78</sup> Pastor #25

<sup>79</sup> Pastor #1

### **Importance of feeling like members**

We have mentioned that teenagers are often the forgotten group. We have stated their different likes and dislikes and also added how this plays a factor in how teenagers are a group that is neglected. Nevertheless this vital group of God's flock needs to be embraced and utilized as part of the church's ministry! Teens need to be aware that they are important in the church. This means adult members should not ignore or downplay the importance of teens in the church. Young people already have to deal with negative stereotypes in society where often they are viewed as being more of a hassle to people than a blessing. One place where they should not have to worry about their unique style is in the church. They are precious in the sight of God and therefore they should be looked upon by the church in the same manner. When members keep this truth of God in mind, teenagers feel they are just as vital a member as anyone else in the church.

A way in which we can make teens feel more welcome and part of the church is by encouragement. Too often adults are quick to dismiss speaking an encouraging word to a teen simply because they feel they are not that influential of a person or they have nothing meaningful to say to them. Yet the reality is that when it comes to encouragement, it does not have to be too complicated. A simple word of kindness or a question about their life will go a long way. This act of kindness shows the teenagers that they are not invisible but important to the older members of the church.<sup>80</sup>

Ultimately we strive to live a life of love and encouragement with fellow brothers and sisters in the faith because God's Word implores us to do so. We have numerous examples in Scripture that encourage us to build up and support others. In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul praises this sort of brotherly love. He is impressed with the Thessalonians ability withstand persecutions. He attributes their love for each other as a reason that helps them overcome the attacks of this world.<sup>81</sup> With these words of God in our hearts and minds, it is important to practice encouraging fellow Christians, especially younger Christians who may face stronger temptations from the world and the devil. We are not to carry this lifestyle out simply because God commands it; rather, the love of the gospel message and love for God's Church now and for

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<sup>80</sup> Pastor #19

<sup>81</sup> 1 Thessalonians

years to come is what motivates a life of encouragement. “For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”<sup>82</sup>

If a congregation is able to establish solid bonds between people of different age groups it is well on its way to make everyone in the church feel important and welcome. This can be a huge benefit to the church as it tries to keep its own teenagers connected. When teenagers feel like they are worth something they are more likely to stay there and stay involved. One of the ways that this can be accomplished is by trying to create a “family” feeling in church. This approach is obviously easier in smaller churches where everyone knows everyone else and sees them regularly, but that does not make it impossible for bigger churches to do it also. A congregation can create this atmosphere when people are more willing to interact with each other, help each other out, and support the events and activities of each other.<sup>83</sup> If the members of the church become like a big family they are more likely to turn to each other in times of need as well as times of rejoicing. In a family everyone is equal but has their own jobs and responsibilities; so it is in the church. This mentality allows teenagers to feel like they belong and are as much a part of the church as anyone else. As one pastor puts it, “In our congregation we emphasize the family of believers. We want our children to see the great gift in the church of having believers of all ages to remind us of what Christ has done for all of us.”<sup>84</sup>

Another way to help teenagers feel like they are full-fledged members of the church is to allow their voice to be heard. Today it seems like people completely dismiss the idea that teenagers are mature enough or care enough to come up with worthwhile suggestions for the church. We are not saying that teens should have all rule and power over the workings of the church. However, on certain topics, especially those pertaining to youth ministry, it would be wise to seek their input. When it comes to matters of adiaphora, like what activity to do that month or which book of the Bible to study next in Bible class, it would be wise for a congregation and its youth leaders to seek the advice of those they are trying to serve. As Thom and Joani Schultz say in their book, “So often we’ve seen youth ministries that go for years without ever asking the kids for their opinions. Instead, the adults theorize and draw conclusions

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<sup>82</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5: 9-11

<sup>83</sup> Pastor #2

<sup>84</sup> Pastor #13

on their own without going to the source. That's like trying to determine what childbirth is like, so you ask everyone in the delivery room—except the mother.”<sup>85</sup> If we as congregations seriously want to keep our teenagers connected to Christ and the church, then we must allow them to voice their opinions, concerns, and suggestions when appropriate

A unique story we got from one of our surveys was from Pastor Steve Soukup. Pastor Soukup is part of an interesting ministry where he allows teenagers to voice their opinions as well as lead in the church. Pastor Soukup is a pastor at an island mission in the Caribbean. Here the average Grenadian is 21 years old. Because of how young the adults are on the island, Pastor Soukup mainly uses young people in the ministry of his church. He uses teenagers in projects and maintenance around the church. Teenagers help out in the planning and conducting of worship as well as heading up their evangelism ministry. Two teenagers are even part of the church council, which demonstrates how serious he feels about teens voicing their opinions as well as how different his church is from the typical Lutheran churches in the United States.<sup>86</sup>

As a result of this unique setting, Pastor Soukup has to teach and encourage his helpers more than he would have to do with adults.<sup>87</sup> Even though these young people are serving in this huge calling, they are still teenagers who have not experience much in life. They are young people who face the same temptations as young people in the United States and therefore, require attention and guidance as they serve God and his church.

Another pastor who practices a similar ministry philosophy is Albrecht Hoffmann a pastor of the ELFK, our sister synod in Germany. Reaching the youth is a big part of Pastor Hoffmann's goal in Germany. For the most part, regular worshippers in Germany are non-existent. This has created an obvious problem for the ELFK. Of the 1300 members of the ELFK, nearly 200 are teenagers. Pastor Hoffmann makes it an emphasis to reach the youth by all means necessary. He has a “Jugendteam” which is a group compromised of young people ranging from ages 16 to 26. This team is responsible for coming up with ways and activities to reach the youth of Germany with the message of Christ.<sup>88</sup>

Pastor Soukup in Grenada and Pastor Hoffmann in Germany are great examples of how young people can work in the church. Even though the cultures and situations for these two

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<sup>85</sup> Schultz, 32.

<sup>86</sup> Pastor #31

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Pastor #36

pastors is unique, there are still important things ‘traditional’ WELS churches can learn from Pastor Soukup and Pastor Hoffmann. WELS congregations do not have to be hesitant in utilizing teenagers in their ministry. These distinct ministries in Grenada and Germany give credence and confidence to WELS churches everywhere that teenagers can serve in the church! Churches will not shut down or go up in flames when teenagers serve or when they let their voices be heard. Allowing a younger generation to add input into the ministry of the church will bring a vibrant and fresh perspective. It will give them the opportunity to feel connected to the ministry and mission of the congregation.<sup>89</sup> When the youth are given the opportunity to voice their ideas and concerns they are more likely to feel like an important part of the church and more eager to serve their church.<sup>90</sup>

After looking at these two special ministries dedicated to the youth, we can implement some of the things by giving teenagers an opportunity to help carry out the mission of the congregation. As good Lutherans, we know the first and main goal of the church is to preach the gospel. Yet that is not the only mission that our Lord has given us to do. He has also called on us to be “foot-washers” and servants<sup>91</sup>. He has called us to serve others in the best ways we can. This calling from Jesus is not restricted to those 21 and older but includes teenagers and young believers. Therefore it is important that we allow these believers to show their joy and love for Christ in acts of service in and for the church as well.

### **Importance of using their talents**

One of the ways that seems most effective in making the teens feel they are a part of the church is by giving them actual duties to perform where they can best use their talents and skills. Kind and loving words are helpful in showing teenagers they are valued, but allowing them to serve in specific jobs in the church will validate their place in the church. One pastor mentions the different activities and duties his youth participate in. “Teens help out in piano playing for church, guitar playing for church. They conduct and write new member interviews for inclusion in the bulletin. They also serve as volunteers at our various outreach events like soccer camp and outdoor movie night.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Pastor #35

<sup>90</sup> Pastor #36

<sup>91</sup> A reference to Jesus command to “wash one another’s feet” from John 13:14

<sup>92</sup> Pastor #2

Now a struggle may be that teens are simply not interested in the different services being offered at church. For the most part, teens do not want to perform janitorial work or pick weeds in the flower bed on a Saturday morning. They may also be hesitant to work after church on a Sunday, because it takes more time out of their weekend. It is essential that we do not just thrust the “left-over” jobs on the teenagers because often that will just frustrate them and drive them away. One pastor put it this way, “In general the older members have a positive influence when they reach out and encourage teens to participate. However, that potential for positive influence shrinks if the teens begin to think they are being asked to do the throw-away jobs no one else wants to do (such as filling in for childcare when no one else can be found).”<sup>93</sup> When we make a teenager perform an undesirable task we have turned something that was supposed to be done out of thanks and love into an unpleasant chore. We, therefore, need to keep this in mind when dealing with young people. We should not berate them for their apprehensions in working for the church. Instead with gospel motivation on our minds and in our hearts, we need to give teenagers the opportunities to serve in meaningful jobs.<sup>94</sup> These jobs will not only make use of the individual talents of the teenagers, but will also benefit God’s church by their service.

Perhaps a useful suggestion for pastors is to schedule one-on-one time with a teenager in which a teenager can assist the pastor in certain areas of ministry. For instance, a teen may help a pastor make outreach calls.<sup>95</sup> This opportunity could be beneficial for both pastor and teenager as they learn from and encourage each other. This experience would also allow the teenager to experience a very real and often unseen side of the church’s ministry. The pastor could then invite the teenager to get some ice cream or a soda after the experience and discuss the visits they had made, as well as discuss what’s going on in that young person’s life. During this time the pastor and the teen would build on their relationship with each other while also working to build up God’s kingdom. The teenager also would gain good experience from a Christian role model on sharing one’s faith with someone who may not know Jesus. This experience may alleviate the fear the teen had about evangelizing people and give him confidence to share the news of Jesus to the unbelieving world. The teen would also have a stronger relationship with the pastor, making it easier for the young person to approach his pastor with concerns or suggestions he may have for the ministry of the church.

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<sup>93</sup> Pastor #11

<sup>94</sup> Pastor #8

<sup>95</sup> Pastor #12

If a teenager is more quiet and reserved and talking to strangers is really not their strong suit, the pastor may suggest they help in beautifying worship. A teenager may have musical gifts in which they can assist in worship. Maybe there is a young person who is interested in drama or theater and wants to help by reading the Bible lessons on Sunday. Often teenage girls are interested in taking care of the little children while also demonstrating maturity to serve in this way. Perhaps certain teenagers can watch children during Bible class, so the parents have the opportunity to be nourished spiritually in the study of God's Word.

The third area of ministry teens can assist the pastor is education. Sunday school and Vacation Bible School are great ways in which teenagers can serve God's people. Again this service may be directed toward young females rather than males, but there are always exceptions. Young people can help the pastor recruit children from the neighborhood for their VBS program. They also can assist their pastor in teaching and educating the children in God's Word. It may seem like a daunting task at first, but sharing God's Word with children is not that difficult. For some of the children attending VBS this may be the first time they are hearing the message of Jesus. A simple gospel message from a teenager may drive the point home for children more clearly than the message coming from an adult. Furthermore, allowing the teenagers the joy of telling others about Jesus may encourage them to think about dedicating their lives to the full time ministry.

Whatever the duty may be, it is a good practice for the pastor or another church leader to personally ask these teenagers to help around the church in an area that suits their likes and talents.<sup>96</sup> Their service in the church will not be painful for young people. Instead they will be excited and more at ease in helping around the church. And by being personally asked and given the opportunity to help the teenagers will feel that this is "their" church. They will see firsthand how their lives of Christian service are integral to the work of the church.<sup>97</sup> They feel a connection with their brothers and sisters in the faith, the connection that makes them one in mission, even if their job and gifts are different than other people in the church.

But how do you get teenagers placed in the right jobs or situations? And how do you make sure that they will enjoy what they are doing and can handle the responsibility? An easy way to get started with this process is by having the teenagers take a Time and Talent survey

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<sup>96</sup> Pastor #24

<sup>97</sup> Pastor #35

when they graduate finish Catechism class.<sup>98</sup> This will allow them to decide in what ways they would most enjoy serving God as it gives them an opportunity to assess their own gifts and talents.<sup>99</sup> It is important for a pastor to remember that these teens have spiritual gifts given to them by God and that God wants them to be used for his glory and for the benefit of his Church.<sup>100</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In the end, teenagers are part of the sinful world which God desired to save through Jesus Christ. God wants all people to be saved including teenagers.<sup>101</sup> Since this is God's will, faithful Christians aspire to carry out God's will by sharing the saving message of Jesus with people from all settings and ages. When dealing with the youth, Christian love and care stemming from the gospel should be our chief motive in reaching the youth. A meaningful way to carry this out is by building and sustaining relationships with teenagers. No doubt this is easier said than done. There are a variety of reasons which make relating with teenagers difficult. However with a Christian attitude towards the youth, God-fearing people strive to make this connection! Learn about the latest music to which youth are listening. Be aware of what popular books are out there and with what movies teenagers are obsessed. Be educated in what teenagers enjoy so making a connection with them comes about naturally. For when young people see how much an adult cares for them, they do not undermine adults when they speak the truths of God's Word.

Our research has shown teenagers are an ever-changing, complex people. They want to have meaningful relationships with people, even if they fail to show this all the time among older people. Teenagers also want to make sense and meaning of their life while having fun and enjoying the blessings God has given to them in life. Take note of these facts as you look to build bonds with teenagers.

A recurring theme we also found in keeping teens connected to the church is the influence of older people. First and foremost, parents need to take the lead on making sure their

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<sup>98</sup> Pastor #8

<sup>99</sup> Pastor #6

<sup>100</sup> Pastor #8

<sup>101</sup> 1 Timothy 2:3,4



children are being nourished with God's Word at home. Teenagers need to witness parents actively living their faith so they can witness firsthand what God expects from his people.

Pastors and teachers also play a major role in how teenagers stay connected with the church and with individual members of the church. We show this love and service for teenagers because the greatest servant acted on behalf of us: "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*"<sup>102</sup> Jesus' saving work allows us to emulate this servant attitude when we try to relate and minister with teenagers. Get rid of all barriers that may stand in the way of you and the youth. Embrace their differences. Love them as dearly beloved children of God. Teach them law and gospel. Share with them the reality of this sinful world, the reality that we are disobedient people who deserve nothing less than damnation in hell. But then, be quick to proclaim God's grace to them and how the gospel is the most important news they will ever hear in their lives. Be all things to all people. Be a jack of all trades. Be a caring and loving Christian mentor to the youth all the while realizing that you have no power, in and of yourself, to keep them connected to Christ and his Church. Instead your job is to preach the Word of God and let the Holy Spirit do his job as he sees fit.

In this paper we have been privileged to research and study the ways to keep teenagers connected to Christ and his Church. We have shown the importance of using the means of grace with them, building meaningful relationships with them, and giving them opportunities to serve. We have displayed the necessity of creating a caring culture for them in the church and giving them opportunities to voice their opinions. We also demonstrated the value of dedicating time and resources to these important members of the body of Christ. In addition, our appendix provides a practical list of summary points that would be beneficial for pastors and youth leaders to consider while ministering to teenagers.

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<sup>102</sup> Mark 10:45

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## Survey Contributors

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NOTE: The men listed above are all pastors who responded to our survey. They are presented here in alphabetical order by last name. However, to keep their comments anonymous, we assigned each pastor a random number. Whenever we reference an individual pastor's survey comments in our paper we cite it according to that assigned number.

## **Top 10 Summary Points**

### **1. Empower the teens with the Word of God**

It is only God's Word that creates faith, strengthens faith, and motivates Christian living. So fill them up with the Word. Even during fun activities, take time to refill their spiritual "gas tanks".

### **2. Be ready to use the Law and Gospel often**

In most cases, your first role in the lives of these teenagers is their pastor. So don't shy away from using that special role to tell them what they need to hear when they need to hear it. When they do something wrong don't shy away using the law to point out their sin and need to repent. However, when they repent of their sins, be just as quick to point them to their Savior and assure them of full and free forgiveness that is theirs.

### **3. Build a caring culture**

Remind them that as fellow Christians they are brothers and sisters in the family of their heavenly Father. Because they are part of a family they know that they have brothers and sisters who care for them. When they need someone to talk to or lean on they will know that they have peers who care for them and want to help them.

### **4. Find others to help you lead**

Knowing your own congregation, you know which members have the gifts and abilities to help lead the group. This insures some stability in the group even when the members turn over in four years. It also means that if you take a call or have a change in ministry focus the youth group doesn't flounder without you.

### **5. Be flexible**

No two people are the same. Each individual has unique gifts and talents he or she has been given by God. Topics and activities that interest some teens may not interest others. There is no silver bullet that says all teens will love "this" or "that" so don't be afraid to try a method or activity out and then scrap it if it does not work.

## **6. Teenagers are the present**

Too often people refer to youth and teenagers as the future leaders of the church. While it is true that they may not have the same responsibilities as the adults in the congregation, it doesn't mean that they should have no role or responsibilities. Don't view them as your "future" but rather take advantage that they are part of your "present". Provide them with opportunities to use their energy, enthusiasm, and willing attitude to serve their God and benefit his church. This will also make it easier as they transition into roles of greater responsibility.

## **7. Get them involved**

Whether it is reading in worship, singing in a choir, cutting the grass, visiting elderly, hanging flyers, teaching VBS, or countless other things, let the teens use the gifts and talents God has given them. If they see and feel that they are wanted and needed they are less likely to drift away.

## **8. Allow them to be heard**

Just as they have been given talents and gifts to serve others, so also they have been given talents and gifts which allow them to give input into ministry. Don't be afraid to ask them what they think about something. Don't be afraid to let them set a goal and plan for what they want to do and accomplish as a youth group.

## **9. Put your time into the teenagers**

This is true not only at church on Sunday mornings but in the activities of their lives. Make time to support them by watching their soccer game or school play. It may not seem like normal church work, but the more time you put into your teenagers, the clearer it is how important they are to you.

## **10. Use the parents to your advantage**

God has given parents the position and opportunities to have the greatest influence on the teens, use that to your advantage. Get the parents on board in the ministry and help them encourage and support the teenager.

## Survey: Pastor #1

### **1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

Besides regular worship and reception of the Lord's Supper, we have an Active Christian Teens group which meets every Sunday morning during the Bible Class/Sunday School hour. Bible study is the primary reason for that meeting. Besides that, I try to stay interested and connected to the teens of the congregation, giving gospel encouragement as appropriate. We also have a weekly devotional that is sent out to all our communicant members who have email addresses. Although teens are less likely to regularly check their email, some still do.

### **2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

There is obviously overlap in this question and the next. Being active in worship and in the ACTs gatherings means staying connected to fellow Christians. Besides the weekly Bible class on Sunday mornings, our ACTs leader tries to do something special with the teens every month. For example, in September we went to Night of Joy and Disney (an annual Christian music extravaganza). They do other things like car washes, the Easter breakfast, have a Christmas party with gift exchange, go bowling/mini golf/movie/paint ball a couple of times a year. One of the big things is the WELS International Youth Rally and/or District youth gatherings. Besides the rally itself, you have travel and the fund raising efforts to get there. All develop or reinforce the Christian bonds.

### **3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

More overlap. We try to get our teens involved in regular ministry like ushering, altar guild, work days, Harvest Festival, VBS, our summer Day Camp, coaching and the like. Besides that, there are some teen-specific service projects like the car wash, the Easter breakfast, and special meals. (Last year, they hosted a Valentine's Dinner that went quite well.) Most of these special service projects have donations involved (fund raisers), but not exclusively. One neat thing they are doing this year is collecting money/gifts for the elderly/lonely in the congregation. The idea is to remember and give Christmas gifts to those who have no family and therefore no presents for Christmas. While not necessarily gospel ministry, it is a ministry of love and compassion.

### **4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

From my perspective, these are probably the most significant: 1) PARENTS. I can't stress that enough. If the parents don't bring them or don't support the ministry, nothing gets done. It will flop. Our teen group has struggled for years. This year, we've tripled our average attendance. Why? Because we have a group of teens whose parents are regular in Bible study and bring their

kids, More than just bringing kids, it's the way parents speak of it and support the ministry with their words and actions. 2) INERTIA. A child who is active going into their teen years will probably stay active. The teen who has done little to date, will most likely do even less. (Much of this goes back to #1.) 3) PRIORITIES. Teens are so busy. They are being pulled in so many different ways. Sports, music, dance, movies, shopping, the beach, school, other extra curriculums, boyfriend/girlfriend, all eat away at the time. 4) WOW FACTOR. Because of #3, it seems you have to do something big, something WOW, to garner excitement. This, then, feeds on itself. One feels the need to constantly WOW to encourage participation. This is both unrealistic and unsustainable. 5) PERSONAL CONFLICTS. If we're really honest about teens, you know how personalities can either help or hinder activity. If you have a core group who is open, inviting and inclusive, others will join in. They will want to be around each other. However, if you have those nasty cliques, or there is a feud between this person or that person, or that boy dumped that girl and so now she and her friends are not going to come. For that matter, the conflict could be with the teen leader or with another parent or between parent and parent.... Oh the petty workings of the devil that impede true Christian ministry and fellowship! NOTE: This is by no means an exhaustive list. Given more time, I could probably come up with five more. But this is a good start.

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

This is an area we are trying to work on. We feel it is a great advantage for the youth generation and the grandparent generation to interact with one another. We try hard to facilitate opportunities for this interaction, to great or lesser degrees of success. The older members have so much to offer the youth with regards to life experiences and just general interest. Generally, the elderly enjoy seeing children so much. And the youth, although initially tentative, have this natural way of breaking through the crusty exteriors and reaching the hearts of those elderly. It can be such a wonderful thing. So obviously, I believe the older members can have a positive influence on the youth. But like any other time you have sinners dealing with sinners (or saints dealing with saints) there can be both positive and negative influences. If the elderly blurt out biases or speak in less than godly ways, it can have a negative influence. If kindness is not reciprocated or received with thankfulness, it can have a negative influence on the youth. Call it the "Grumpy Old Man" syndrome. Such attitudes do not encourage life-long faithfulness to the Lord, if this is what I turn into.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

PARENTS. Hands down, no questions. Most confirmands cannot drive. They are dependent upon their parents to get them to events and to encourage participation. If the pattern/participation is not there before they drive, it's highly unlikely that it will happen once they can drive. The only exception would be a close friend/parent who gives them a ride.



## Survey: Pastor #2

### **1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

The Staff Minister and I take turns teaching the teen class. At the beginning of class I always ask them to share one blessing and one challenge from the week. I then work those thoughts into the opening or closing prayer. It also gives me a chance to see what's going on in their lives.

We also have a youth group that operates under the direction of our staff minister. He has organized a regional youth rally and has been good about getting the teens involved with service projects. They've also done mission trips to help other congregations in our district with VBS etc.

Our choir director has also been working with a teen choir. It's another contact that one of our mature member has with the youth as they gather to work on sharing God's Word in song.

### **2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

We have done a youth rally. Because of distances, however, this is a challenge. The nearest congregation is over an hour away and they have been without a pastor so it's been hard to coordinate events.

We have also brought in Travel Canvass Witness teams to help with our soccer camps. Often these groups have young people in them and we always try to coordinate fellowship events between these teens and ours.

### **3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

Choir. Piano playing for church. Guitar playing for church. Conducting and writing new member interviews for inclusion in the bulletin. They also serve as volunteers at our various outreach events like soccer camp and outdoor movie night.

### **4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

It's probably because they haven't been personally asked to contribute in a meaningful way. But this is hard to do. It take a faithful coordinator to get the teens together for a youth choir for example.

### **5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

We're blessed with a small congregation and so we have a family atmosphere here. I have older members who will take the teens hunting. Other older members will make a point of attending our teens' school activities like football games and concerts.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

Faithful study of God's Word on the part of the teen and genuine love and concern from the leaders and older members of the congregation.

### Survey: Pastor #3

**1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

Teen group, involve them in ushering, various service projects, plan an annual "teen" service

**2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

We operate our group in connection with another WELS church. Encourage Regional and national youth rally participation, have 2-3 activities a year with teens from other WELS congregations.

**3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?** Ushering and service projects

**4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

It is not so much apprehension, but a troubling influence by their public high school classmates who are very often "churched" in name only. I have had the opportunity to speak to pastors not in our fellowship about this and all of them are struggling to get teens more involved.

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?** Sadly in the congregation I serve, the older members have a negative relationship with the teens. While they will say that keeping the youth involved is important, the decisions and actions they often take send the opposite message.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

Parents, parents, parents, then friends in school. When parents are active in worship and service in the congregation, teens often follow their lead. When the parents are in worship but not serving, the teens are less involved. If the parents are sporadic in worship, the teens are gone.

**Survey: Pastor #4**

**1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

Word and Sacrament

**2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

Youth Rally, youth group.

**3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

Same as everyone else.

**4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

It's not apprehension that is keeping them away from God's Word.

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

Good. Positive.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

Parents.

## Survey: Pastor #5

**1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

Probably nothing to mention here beyond traditional avenues; SS, Conf class, Bible class, Devotions at youth meetings.

**2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

See #3. Youth Groups. We had three divisions: Senior Youth (HS), Junior Youth (later elem and JH), and Micro Youth (PreK and early elem). Projects and activities included fellowship, inreach, and outreach.

**3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

Some with outreach efforts-canvassing, distribution of flyers, Kids Carnival. Some with youth ministry-Sunday school, VBS, \* for Kids. Choir and Ushering. Worship Music. Church Cleaning.

**4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

They may see themselves as not being qualified. It is something to get involved in later. If they are working, there may be time commitment issues. I don't have much free time the way it is (may be true). It's unfamiliar. What if I don't like it?

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

Ours was generally positive. One elderly couple took the youth to McDonalds for Coffee one Sunday a month. One was very straight-forward with them-often telling them things they needed to hear (from someone other than their parents).

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

Parents.

## Survey: Pastor #6

**1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

Teen Bible studies are offered, of course, but I think it's important to get teens into the adult Bible study as soon as possible. Worship participation is essential. We make teen-focused devotional materials available in the library.

**2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

Most of our fellowship activities are directed to entire families and not just one age segment. (This is easier with a smaller congregation.)

**3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

All confirmed members are asked to fill out a Time and Talent survey, so they can participate in any area in which they have gifts or an interest. They serve in worship as musicians and ushers; they help with Lutheran Pioneers and VBS; they assist with handing out flyers for the outreach team.

**4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

In our small congregation, there are not many teens, so the ones that come "stick out" more. Peer pressure, of course, is always an issue. Otherwise, the biggest obstacle to greater teen participation is not an "apprehension" but simply the fact that their lives are overly busy.

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

Many of our older members do a good job of mentoring younger members and giving them encouragement. I see them pulling them aside for a nice chat, showing sincere interest in their lives.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

By far, the parents and their spiritual health. No other factors are nearly as influential as whether or not the teen's family is not only present in church but has an active spiritual life at home as well.

## Survey: Pastor #7

### **1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

Contact with Word and Sacrament is the only way to become and stay connected to Christ. The Divine Service is the only activity of parish life where Word and Sacrament are offered in one setting. So, we encourage teens to come to the Divine Service because it is the place/event where forgiveness is offered and in faith received. We also have a Bible study for teens on Sunday morning.

### **2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

We invite them to receive Holy Communion often because the Sacrament unites them with Christians throughout the world and throughout the ages. We also invite them to participate in parish fellowship activities. We share with them invitations to synod-wide events designed for young people in mind. Teens like to be with other teens, so we offer Bible classes for teens. There is a "critical mass" dynamic that plays in here, too. There need to be more than two to four teens in the class so that others will feel more comfortable to speak or not speak as they are so inclined.

### **3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

The young people assist the Ministry of the church by volunteering as an acolyte, crucifer, or choir member in the Divine Service. They pray for their pastor. They help with Sunday School and as VBS assistants and teachers. They live the mission of the church every day in their vocations as son/daughter, friend, student, employee. It comes joyfully to the New Man inside them.

### **4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

Usually, if their parents aren't coming to church, they won't either. They also are apprehensive when they are led to believe that they aren't really meaningful members of the church unless they are volunteering on a committee or taking part in retreats or car wash fund raisers, etc. I have found that young people just want to hear the gospel in the Divine Service on Sunday so that they can cope with the evil they encounter during the week. They don't want to feel like that if they participate in an activity at church they will be asked to do some more work "for the church."

### **5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative**

### **influence on the youth?**

At our parish the older members have a strong and positive influence on the youth and vice versa. We offer one style of service on Sunday (liturgical) so that the 60-year-old stands next to the 16-year-old singing the same songs, receiving the same Sacrament together. There is no other event in society where that kind of dynamic takes place. It's a shame that in their effort to relate to young people, some churches (via the "older members") have offered a cafeteria approach to worship on Sunday. It is misguided to think that offering a "contemporary" service as opposed to a "traditional" service will attract young people to come to church. I have found that it doesn't attract them as much as some would like to think and in fact such an approach actually divides the Body of Christ. I can offer research that shows young people are being attracted to liturgical worship. They want "transcendent" worship forms, forms that make them feel like they are at church, not the mall or a movie theater.

### **6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

Of course, the biggest factor is the Holy Spirit working through Word and Sacrament. Second would be the parents bringing them to church and modeling their faith in their family life together. The third factor is when the pastor and parish really believe and therefore carry out Ministry in such a way that what they are offering in Word and Sacrament is the actual forgiveness of sins, right then and there, not a remembrance of forgiveness that was somehow applied to the entire world 2,000 years ago when Christ died and rose again. This will show itself in the pastor and parish's attitude about the frequency of offering Holy Communion and the practice of Private Confession and Absolution. It will show itself in how the pastor catechizes the young people from the Bible, spending plenty of time listening to/studying God's Word. Personally, I can say that it is one of the most rewarding aspects of my ministry to see pre-teen catechumens responding with eager questions and answers in Catechism class because the Holy Spirit works faith in their hearts through the Word.



## Survey: Pastor #8

### **1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

Being a small mission congregation with only a handful of teens spread over a large region, we have our share of challenges, but unique opportunities for blessing as well. The groundwork for keeping our teens connected to Christ starts in the home. Our confirmation curriculum is designed in such a way that parents and students have to work together outside of the classroom on projects, “How Would You Respond?” questions, etc., while the students meet with the pastor twice a month (1x for unit lesson & 1x for review and discussion a couple weeks later). Our Confirmation Class is a three-year process during which the students not only cover the basic parts of the Catechism at least twice, but also receive training in what it means to be a Lutheran, the basics of Lutheran worship, and “My Christian Life”, where we discuss Christian vocation, stewardship, and personal study of God’s Word. Confirmation is concluded with a major test, an essay on what they believe, and an interview with the Pastor, which becomes something of a “passing of the baton” as the students discuss with the Pastor how they’ll continue growing in Christ. They also receive a “Spiritual Growth Toolkit” with a devotion book, prayer book, and a couple other resources to help them continue growing. When they are confirmed, I encourage them to take advantage of receiving our weekly e-updates as well as liking our Facebook page where we share videos and texts of Sunday’s sermons. Teen Bible studies are offered on a weekly basis with occasional joint studies with the adults. We also have a fantastic group of parents right now who do an excellent job of making sure their children are in worship and Bible study. I personally try to keep up with our teens to see how they’re doing and encourage parents to bring their kids if they’ve been absent. As they near the end of their high school years, I try to take some time to speak with the parents and the student about the importance of choosing a college that is relatively near a WELS/ELS congregation to keep connected to Christ and his Word. Through all of this process, we strive to instill an understanding that the life of a Christian is a life of continual growth in God’s Word. So far the Lord has richly blessed these efforts from Confirmation to college.

### **2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

Being in a small mission congregation where the next closest WELS church is 70+ miles away, connecting with fellow Christians outside of our Christian is rather difficult. We have had students who have attended the International Youth Rally, and have encouraged our families with teens to take part in our District Retreats and events when they are offered. At the same time, fellowship among believers young and old is a hallmark of our congregation. We offer seasonal “Youth and Family” events and have sought to offer activities specifically for our teens to get together. Although they come from all over our region, they are very close and have a very

strong relationship with our members young and old. You will almost always find our teens attending the various events and get-togethers we have as a congregation.

### **3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

We have put a greater emphasis on this in recent years than had been done in the past, and we strive to get them involved in real ministry activities and not just the tasks the adults don't want to do. Young men are encouraged to participate as ushers as soon as they are confirmed. They are teamed up with an experienced usher for a time to learn the tricks of the trade and then take over on their own. I have also strongly encouraged our young men who are not old enough to be voters to still attend the meetings with their fathers to see the business of ministry in our congregation. Our entire nursery staff is manned by the young ladies of our congregation from 6th – 12th grades. Our young ladies have also gained a great deal of experience as Sunday School teacher assistants in the early childhood and primary grade classes. All of our teens serve as group leaders or teacher's assistants during our outreach events like Christmas and Easter for Kids, and especially Vacation Bible School (during which they often work together with our collegiate TCW teams). During their confirmation years, I also have them take a Time and Talents survey just like our BIC students, since the Lord is giving their gifts to the body of Christ too. In our daughter congregation 70 miles to the north, our teens there run the MIDI, carry out altar guild tasks, help set up in our motel meeting space, and usher.

### **4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

We have a rather unique situation in our congregation. Of the students I have confirmed since I arrived here in 2005, none of them have shied away from being active in the church, but most of the students confirmed during the ten-year vacancy prior to my arrival fell away from the church in the first few years I was here. Knowing their family situations, there was usually only support from one parent to attend and participate, while the other was non-committal or even hostile to their participation. This unfortunately fostered an apathy and dislike for the church and being active in it in their later teen years. We have worked very hard to counter those backdoor losses as we created a process with the support of parents and elders that would keep these young people connected to Christ and his people. We realize that this won't always be the case, but it has made a profound impact on our congregation as a whole.

### **5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

Our congregation, being as small as it is, is like a family (and in many cases, people literally are related!). Right now I think the relationship between the older members and the youth has been very good. We have such a small facility and congregation that it's hard for the teens to have no

connection to the older members. Personally, I think the increased activity and spiritual strengthening of our youth has encouraged our older members as to the future of God's church. At the same time, our parents have done an excellent job fostering respect for the older members in our congregation. It's been a great blessing as we see what God has been able to do across generations.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

Moms and Dads, who together actually care about the spiritual life of their children. If not for the care our parents have had in the spiritual upbringing of their children and keeping them connected to Christ and his people, I think our efforts would not have borne such abundant fruit.

## Survey: Pastor #9

### **1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

We have two small congregations (dual parish). The most successful youth connections have been youth rally's and entertainment (Noah's Ark, Great America, etc.)

### **2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

Attempts at Sunday bible studies have not worked. Many of the parents/families of teens are less consistent at worship after their child (children) are confirmed. During the week there is competition with public school activities. Trying to do things Monday thru Saturday (whatever it may be) have been unsuccessful.

### **3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

The best assistance (when it comes) usually involves helping with technology things (hymnsoft, computer/projector/screen, etc.), singing in choir, but mostly when personally asked to do so.

### **4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

They are more anxious to get "out the door" than stay with all the old people at church. So it seems.

### **5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

Some older people are excellent examples. Most older people say little to nothing to young people. But even those who do not verbally encourage the young remain good examples at attendance to worship and serve the Lord. The younger people say very little to the older people.

### **6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

Friends influence first. Parents influence second. Pastor influence third. Or worse. Of course, we'd like to think the gospel is why the young (and old) attend and remains the message they are happy to hear. To a degree that surely is true. But I am afraid older pastors like myself are also not very adept at communicating the message of God's Word in young people's type of language, young people's type of illustrations, etc. Maybe more of the message from the Word has to be put in simpler words with less theological language. I don't know. But this I do know.

The gospel is still highly powerful. Getting the children to keep coming to church is challenge number one. Helping cater to their “listening” needs is another.

CONCLUSION: Youth ministry has become one of the most frustrating aspects of my ministry. Or should I say challenging? I yearn for more opportunities to share the gospel with the young, but the opportunities seems to shrink as they get older.

## Survey: Pastor #10

### **1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

- Regular Sunday morning worship (Should not be underestimated!)
- Regular Sunday Bible classes for grades 9-12 taught by pastors or L.E.S. principal
- Youth group program that involves Bible study, fellowship, outreach, and service opportunities
- Inviting youth to be involved in church activities soon after confirmation: ushering, choir, maintenance of building and grounds, teaching VBS, assisting with Sunday School, etc.
- Invite youth to be active in our Men's Bible Study and Ladies' Bible Study

### **2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

- Promote District Teen camps and WELS International Youth Rallies
- Mission trips to assist other churches in our district
- Youth Group Facebook page
- Recreation component of our regular youth group program

### **3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

- Teaching, leading songs at VBS
- Teaching soccer skills at Summer Soccer-Bible Camp
- Some assist with Sunday School classes in lower grades
- Nursery volunteers during Bible classes or worship
- Inviting friends to youth group meetings or to Sunday worship
- Ushering
- Altar Guild
- Choir
- Church cleaning
- Lawn mowing and yard maintenance

### **4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

- Church isn't cool with their peer group
- Parents aren't actively involved themselves
- Church doesn't receive high enough priority in very busy high school life, especially if they are employed or very active in sports
- Don't always see the message as being directed at their life and circumstances
- Don't see how being active in church benefits themselves. Though they have a desire to feel a sense of purpose, they have learned to evaluate activities based on perceived benefit to self. They

are so busy with finding and preparing for their regular earthly vocations that they don't see their place in the Great Commission. They haven't "bought into the mission" very deeply.

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

Generally the relationship is good and the influence is positive. The older members could give more attention to the youth than they do. Adults need to think of mentoring and training the next generation to replace them in their congregational responsibilities. Adults need to think about actively recruiting from the teens (and twenties, for that matter).

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

--Christ (That's the real answer)

--Parents (Humanly speaking, they have far more influence than anyone else, whether for good or for bad)

## Survey: Pastor #11

**1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

We offer a "teen" Bible class on Sunday morning which is geared toward the teen age group.

**2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

We offer them the same opportunities as everyone else-bible class, service in the church, and fellowship with fellow Christians.

**3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

They assist in committees, with childcare, and in service projects around the church (cleaning, maintenance, etc.)

**4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

Generally we never get to the root of the apprehensions, usually the excuses of work, school work, sports, etc. serve to avoid any thought of apprehension.

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth? Define "older".** In general the older (non-teen) members have a positive influence when they reach out and encourage teens to participate. However, that potential for positive influence shrinks if the teens begin to think they are being asked to do the throw-away jobs no one else wants to do (such as filling in for childcare when no one else can be found.)

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

Parents



## Survey: Pastor #12

**1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

We have a youth group for children in grades 6 through high school that meets twice/month for Bible Study, service opportunities, and outings. We also have a Teen Class for high school-aged kids every Sunday morning.

**2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

The youth group canvasses and passes out information to the community for our annual VBS, Christmas for Kids, and Easter for Kids outings. They are also invited and encouraged to attend fellowship outings, often serving as the sponsoring organization for these outings (corn maze, hockey/baseball/football games, etc.)

**3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

By helping teach and serve at VBS, CFK, and EFK. Many volunteered for this past summer's VBS Soccer Camp. They had out information in canvassing outings and help staff the church's booth at the county fair each summer. Some even volunteer their time working at our child care center.

**4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

I've found that in most situations, teenage delinquency is the result of parental delinquency. If the parents come, the children usually come and are active in the church. On occasion hectic schedules cause some conflicts with worship and other church events.

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

Relationships here at Messiah are quite good. Then again, we have a good group of young people and a number of members in their 20s as well. It seems as if the older members are respected and provide a positive influence on the youth with their church attendance and service.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

Faithful and caring parents will always have the most influence, but pastors also play a role. It's important to take interest in their lives. Ask them about school. Develop a bond with them in confirmation and youth group. Give them something to do. Just try and relate to them and let them know you care.

### Survey: Pastor #13

**1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

We have gone to a system of having our parents teach Confirmation to their own children. This has been helpful in that the emphasis of the Word of God in our lives is not a "subject" that you learn like math or science, but it is a devotional way of family life. Since we began this 6 years ago, we have had good results with our teens remaining a part of our family of believers.

**2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

We have a smaller congregation and so it is less of an issue. We do have a teen Bible class that helps the teens get to know one another better and to see the close relationship they have through our doctrine and practice.

**3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

Our Teen Bible class is very well done and gives a great reminder of the great commission.

**4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

In our experience, those that stay away from the Church do so from lack of parental encouragement or parental involvement.

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth?**

In our congregation we emphasize the family of believers. We want our children to see the great gift in the church of having believers of all ages to remind us of what Christ has done for all of us. Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth? In our congregation the older people are a good example of Christian faithfulness and a willingness to reach out with the Word.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

I am firmly convinced that teen participation is based on parental encouragement and the expectation of the congregation that teens are no different than the rest of the family of believers. Consider the Synod's study on the retention of teens in the Parochial vs. Public schools. There is only a small margin of difference. Other recent studies outside our Synod have shown that the attempts to "separate out" the children from worship in special Sunday School classes and teen classes and activities has produced poor long term results in that those children feel they have no place in a church made up of a variety of ages and beliefs. In the

history of the church the whole teen phenomenon is new and driven by a godless society. Even the term teenager is a recent addition to our vocabulary. I believe that we will have the most overall success in retaining members of all ages by instilling them with a clear and strong understanding of law and gospel and letting the Holy Spirit do His job.

## Survey: Pastor #14

**1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

Teen Bible studies and Bible “talks” at the start of teen activities or outings.

**2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

Monthly teen activities and service opportunities, such as simple get-togethers at a members’ houses, lock-ins, serving at fellowship meals, etc. We also try to promote teen activities with neighboring congregations, and we seek to send as many teens as are willing and able to youth rallies.

**3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

Teens assist mostly in service opportunities such as ushering, serving meals, etc. Also sometimes in worship. A couple assist in teaching Sunday School. Several assist in VBS.

**4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church’s ministry?**

In talking with a few former teens who are now on our elder’s list, I get the impression that they saw their teen years in church as something they had to do in order to please their parents. (Interesting that their teen years were years that this congregation had a very active teen ministry). They don’t like the “institution” of church

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

I see great benefits in having parents involved in their teens’ lives at church. My perception is that the teens still enjoy having their parents around, if only the parents give them some freedom to make decisions and are not always hovering. The relationship between older members and teens is a mixed bag. Some of the older members provide a negative example (“That’s not how I want to be when I get that age”). Others provide wonderful examples for the teens to imitate. They recognize the impression that they can make on a young person’s life, even if only by a smile or by a question to see how the teen’s day is going.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens’ participation in the church?**

Absolutely, the parents.

## Survey: Pastor #15

### **1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

The congregation I serve -- St. John's of Zilwaukee, MI -- is very small, just 96 communicants. We currently have a grand total of 7 teenagers on our member roster, one of whom is out-of-state in college and another of whom is part of a seriously delinquent family.

For the remaining 5, we have no special programs or efforts targeting teens to "keep them connected to Christ." This is done through Word and sacrament, as employed both by their parents and the church. Two of our teens are currently in confirmation class and attend Sunday School. Another is a fairly regular attendee at our Sunday morning bible class.

### **2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

Again, no special efforts or programs targeted at teens. We do have periodic activities at church for families that involve the teens, too. Virtually all our teens were very involved in our VBS this past summer. Apart from that, we don't distinguish between teen members and other members. When we do things as part of our faith family at St. John's, the teens are always part of the mix.

### **3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

As I mentioned, virtually all of them were involved in our VBS program. Most of them have assisted with our Easter breakfast or other congregational activities. Some were part of our neighborhood canvas/info distribution effort. One young lady sings with our church choir. One young man is part of our rotation for mowing our church property during the summer and shoveling snow during the winter.

In other words, again, our teens serve in many of the same ways as our older members do. We haven't found a need to distinguish (or discriminate) by age. Perhaps a blessing of being as small as we are as we can easily tailor our efforts to the talents we have available, including the talents of our teen members.

### **4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

So far, I haven't run into what I'd call "apprehensions." The two biggest obstacles to teen involvement, in order of significance, are 1) uninvolved or under-involved parents; and 2) very busy schedules. Teens don't always make wise choices or set wise priorities. Then again, adults don't always do that either. But, by and large, I think our teen involvement has been good. Occasionally, some of our older members have been a little hesitant to "trust" teens with

responsibility, but experience is softening misgivings and building trust.

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

Generally, a positive relationship. Our congregation is pretty geriatric (some might say jurassic), so the "generation gap" is pretty wide in many cases. But our older members are usually thrilled to see young people who are willing to work and worship beside them, and our younger members appreciate being accepted and respected by the oldsters. On occasion, some seniors get a bit annoyed by what they see as the immature behavior of the teens, and the teens may occasionally snicker at what they see as the stodginess of the old folks. Overall, however, I think our elders and younger get on very well, and complement each other nicely.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

## Survey: Pastor #16

### **1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

This question comes at a time in our congregation's history when we have just made a major change to address that very question. As of 2 months ago, we just added a staff minister whose focus is primarily to connect the youth with Christ. While we have always had volunteers to assist the pastor with youth groups and teen Bible studies, we have never had any consistency. The staff minister will bring that consistency. The teens can now count on a regularly scheduled meeting time. Since our staff minister also assists in teaching confirmation class, he encourages them to attend teen Bible study as well. We are setting the stage in our church for regular Bible studies for teens, so that as kids grow in our church, it's just part of the norm. Once we have that consistency in place, it will be easier to invite guests. They are more inclined to be part of something stable, instead of meeting every other third Thursday after the full moon.

We are a relatively new congregation, started in 1998, so for quite a while, the teens were new to our church as were the parents. It wasn't something they or their parents had grown up with, so they would come sporadically and enjoy it, but did not yet see a need to make it a constant. Over the years the kids who have grown up with the church are now ripe for engaging in church life. We also have more mature base of parents who will encourage them to do so.

### **2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

Along with our staff minister, we have a youth activities volunteer. We have planned quarterly outings to get the kids together on a regular basis. We pick events that they will hopefully want to invite friends to: Ski Trip, Camping Trip, Paint ball, Bowling, \*\*Popcorn/Movie night, etc.\*\*

### **3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

The youth help with things within the church: such as ushering and assisting in Sunday school and VBS. They also take part community service projects. Most recently, our teens put together Christmas packages that will be sent to children in Africa.

### **4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

I wouldn't say there is any apprehension. It's simply a matter of time. Our youth are phenomenally busy. Many sports keep them practicing late at night and games take them away on the weekends. There often isn't much time left for church.

### **5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the**

**congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

The older members love having kids around. They recognize that they are the future of our congregation. There seems to be very positive interaction between the older and younger generations. The fact that the congregation fully supports the youth ministry financially and otherwise has a great impact on our youth. They know they are wanted and supported.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

The parents. When we added the staff minister to focus on the youth, it was a decision that was made when we felt the parents were supportive of the work he came to do. The greatest gift you can give to youth is parents who are in the Word. The greatest gift you can give the parents is time spent to instruct and nurture their kids in the Word. The two go hand in hand. But without parent support, it is extremely difficult to have a viable youth ministry.



## Survey: Pastor #17

### **1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

Currently Dove Mountain congregation has 65 members, two of whom are in high school as a sophomore and freshman. We have had a couple other high school students in the past with one currently in college and another who is now in the working world. In the past and at present all of our high schoolers have come from families whose worship attendance is less than 50%. The combination of low number of high school students along with the attendance of weekly worship and the attitude that is behind poor attendance of weekly worship had kept our congregation from forming any kind of a structured high school program. However, that does not mean we have abandoned any effort to nurture these souls at such a critical time in their lives when they are in many ways cementing their view on life, which will be more difficult to change as they become adults. I and the leaders of the congregation want to make at the very least monthly contacts with all of our members and try to make those contacts face to face. We consciously never ask any member who comes to church why they had missed the last three Sundays, but rather smile and express our joy that this Sunday they were motivated to come to God's house and worship with us this week. However, when home visits are made we ask questions about what keeps them from God's house and what we can do to help them in their faith. When we have district rallies or high school gatherings at larger WELS churches we encourage their participation in those activities. We also keep them up to date on our WELS college ministry programs so as they are thinking about college they also have information in front of them to think about their faith. Parents are critical in the spiritual growth of their children and on home visits they are regularly chastised and encouraged in their roles. As teenagers get older and especially as they gain the ability to drive and have access to a car they are held more accountable for their own spiritual growth. They don't have to follow in the spiritual weakness of their parents because they now have the power to control their own Sunday spiritual growth. When I have personal contact with them I do ask them about the issues of what they are going to be when they grow up, peers and what their peers think about God, drugs and sex and how these matters challenge their faith. The relationship I develop with them allows me to ask such personal questions and at the same time grants me an open and honest response from them. When God allows personal or family tragedies or hardships to enter into their lives those are excellent opportunities for me and the congregation to lead them back into the Word they have learned and to lead them to reevaluate what they have done to grow in their faith and set goals for greater spiritual growth and service in God's kingdom. This past Sunday my member who has gone through high school and college with a less than 10% attendance rate wants to meet regularly with me to talk about questions she has about the Bible. This moment is a gift of God's grace, but at the same time it is also a reward for maintaining contact for a long period of time. Our congregation does have three eighth graders who come from very active church going families and I pray their spiritual maturity will allow us to build a more proactive program to the

spiritual formation of our high schoolers. In the end though this time of transition in their lives is a pastor and congregation's time to make sure that contact and influence is not lost on these souls. In addition the pastor and congregation is wise to see the transition of these souls from dependant on parents to independent in the world and so not to continue to treat them as "Eric and Trinity's kid", but as souls who will enter either heaven or hell on the basis of their own faith in the God and his saving work in Christ.

**2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

-- answered above

**3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

I don't believe our congregation treats our teenagers and children much different from our adults. It might be true in larger congregations as well, but in our small congregation we are beggars and not choosers. We use our children to help with all our evangelism efforts of canvassing and community service. We utilize them in teaching youths on Sundays mornings and at Vacation Bible Schools. We utilize them in the Sunday service as greeters, ushers, child givers, midi and music players. They shadow those who have experience and as they grow more comfortable in these areas they begin to take over and take part in a rotation of service.

**4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

--answered above & below

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

Our older members have a positive influence on our youth. Our older members see the youth as the future of the local and universal church. Our older members have younger family members all of the country with various levels of connection with Christ and the church and they love them and want what is best for them and I believe they view our younger members in that light.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church? The biggest factor in the teens participation in the church is the time and effort the pastor and leaders put into them. Wherever the word is sown and nurtured in the hearts of people the Holy Spirit is working to foster spiritual life and growth. People who shy away from the ministry of the church do so because they do not feel comfortable in participating. It's the goal of God and thereby the pastor and members of the church to lead people to find comfort first of all in their relationship**

with Christ and from that foundation to build on growing their comfort level in serving God and his people with their gifts. God bless guys. Grace and peace to you.

## Survey: Pastor #18

**1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

We have an expanded VBS program called "Vacation Bible Camp" in which we have over 40 non-member children attending. Our teens serve as leaders of group of 8-10 of them, taking them to "stations" where our adults serve as teachers. We offer trips to International and Regional Youth Rallies. One of our teens is a helper in the Sunday School, and we try to involve our make teens in ushering. We have 6-8 outings a year as a youth group on top of all this. We encourage our teens to sing in the church choir, and in the WELS regional church chorale.

**2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

see Q. 1 and use to help answer this Q.

**3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

see Q. 1 and use to help answer this Q

**4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

Jobs, Boyfriends, Girlfriends, High School Activities. If they come from delinquent families, they usually follow the worship habits of their parents. Friends from the community often exert peer pressure for them to stay away (ex. staying out late on Saturday nights for the older teens).

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

It is a very good relationship with those whom they work at Bible Camp or in the youth activities. If the adults and teens have no involvement with each other, very little relationship is formed.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

The parents, plain and simple. The second biggest factor would be the congregation, making sure there are plenty of opportunities for them to stay involved.

## Survey: Pastor #19

### **1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

--Each week a prayer email is sent out to our congregation and one of the things our congregation is encouraged to pray for every week are our teens.

--60% of the Sundays our teen group meets for a Teen Bible study led by a lay leader. The other 40% of the Sundays we have the teens join the Adult Bible study. Our prayer is that this will help them as they make the transition from Sunday School to Adult Education.

--On Monday nights we have a Men's Bible study called "Wings & the Word." We fry up some chicken wings, grab our Bibles and select a book to study. A number of dads from our congregation take advantage of this study night as a way to encourage their teenage sons to stay in the Word.

--Currently for our college students I make phone calls and send emails to check in with them and see how they are doing. They have three different venues for daily devotions and daily Scripture reading plans made available to them. We also do a live broadcast of our worship services and I encourage them to join us online if there isn't a WELS/ELS church around their college campus.

--Our 6th-8th grade students attend weekly confirmation classes. Along with encouraging the students to continue to make regular worship, I also take the time to discuss this matter with their parents.

### **2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

--Our teen group meets twice a month for different things--paintballing, game nights, Wii nights, etc.

--Depending on the level of interest, we have sent our teens to various WELS Youth Rallies.

--See answers for #1

### **3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

--Acolytes

--Ushers

--Musicians/Soloists/Choir Members

--Help in our Nursery

--Assist with our Kids' Church program

--Run the sound booth and our weekly worship broadcast.

--Altar Guild

--Canvass

- Clean the church
- Babysit for midweek Bible studies
- Assist with our Easter Egg

**4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

I think that teens, like any other adult member, would have apprehensions about getting involved if they feel that they wouldn't do a good job or fear that they might mess something up or that what they do and the way they serve isn't really all that important. It is important for pastors, lay leaders and parents to encourage young people to use their God-given gifts, assist them and set them up for success and thank them when they do serve.

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

I believe in our congregation the older members and the youth have a very positive relationship. We have a number of adults who go out of their way and make it a point to shake the young peoples' hands, ask them how they're doing, attend their school activities, make them feel important, make them feel wanted.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

Aside from the Holy Spirit, without a doubt I believe that it is their parents. The last time I had checked I believe that we (WELS) lose 70% of the kids that come through our confirmation classes (Don't quote me on that). We (WELS) also have roughly a 50% attendance of our members in worship (Again, don't quote me on that). When our teens see that regular worship attendance isn't the number one priority in their parents' lives, their sinful nature is going to undoubtedly work on them to believe that staying connected to Christ and his Church doesn't need to be a priority in theirs. From our congregation, the parents that make weekly worship, Sunday morning Bible study, and daily family devotions and prayer part of their routine have children who are following in that same pattern.

**Survey: Pastor #20**

**1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

Every Sunday Teen Bible study is the most important way. Also have a number of teens that comes with their family to our monthly “Food, Faith, and Fun” – potluck dinner followed by brief Bible study for whole family, followed by fun and games in gym or in fellowship hall.

**2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

Many of our teens attend MLS. We send our teens to WELS Youth Rally and to area district teen events.

**3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

A few of them who are gifted to do so teach Sunday School. A couple of them play piano for our summer Thursday evening services. They go out and rake leaves each Fall at the home of some of our elderly members.

**4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church’s ministry?**

Their parents not encouraging them enough/insisting that they get involved.

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

Good. I think they have a positive influence on our youth.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens’ participation in the church?**

Their parents.

## Survey: Pastor #21

**1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

Worship, weekly Teen Bible class, monthly youth group events.

**2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

We do this mostly through getting them together at Bible class and youth group events.

**3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

The teens assist in worship as ushers, communion assistants (picking up the cups), running the computer music for some services, helping in the nursery, playing the piano, and singing solos. Some teens help teach Sunday School. We have lots of teens help with VBS in the summer.

**4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

The most common question I get is "who else is going to be there." They will come to almost anything if their friends are going. High school is also very busy for these teens. They have all the school work and then are in band and sports and lots of other activities. They are sometimes just worn out.

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

Outside of the worship service there is not much interaction. The interaction that does take place is generally good. The adults appreciate the energy and enthusiasm the teens have when helping with Sunday School and VBS. The teens learn about service to the Lord by working with the adults.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

Parents. It is of course the Holy Spirit that brings all to faith and moves us to worship and good works. There are a few teens who will come on their own but the vast majority come because their parents strongly encourage them to come. That encouragement is best when the parents have faithfully participated in worship and other aspects of the church for years. Then it is a natural part of what the family does and the teens keep coming. Parents who only come occasionally generally have teens that come even less.



Survey: Pastor #22

**1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

--encourage worship, have a special teen bible class for them, dedicate the work of a second pastor towards them, develop a four year curriculum for bible study to avoid the trendy bible topics which they see as demeaning.

**2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

--area youth activities, monthly "fun" outings, service opportunities.

**3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

--participate in the music program, ushers, communion assistants, projects to help elderly, evangelism door hanging, sunday school and vbs teachers/helpers

**4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

--boring.

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

--by and large the elders want the youth around, but don't want to be inconvenienced by them and are very unforgiving of behavior outside their narrow norms.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

--relationship to the pastor or significant church leader

## Survey: Pastor #23

### **1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

The only way to keep teenagers connected to Christ is by the means that Christ has given us to stay connected to him, no matter what age. So it is the Word and the Sacraments - so simple as to be overlooked at obvious. We keep our teens connected to Christ when they come to worship and are reminded of the promise God made to them in their baptisms. We keep our teens connected to Christ when they come to worship and are reminded to take God seriously in both his threats and his promises of undeserved blessing and rescue. God's Word in the three readings does that very thing. We keep our teens connected to Christ when they come to the communion rail and have real, actual communion with Christ himself, his own body and blood! Again, this is not trivial stuff The means of grace are the means through which the Holy Spirit has confined himself to operate in the hearts and minds of teens. Through them, the Holy Spirit points them to Christ, which is the Holy Spirit's all-consuming job - to point humans to Christ. When it comes to Bible study, we offer our teens their own class. The topics match the Sunday School lessons for that day, but they take it to deeper levels of study that was not possible when the teens were younger kids in Sunday School. Our teen Bible study gives the teens the opportunity to wrestle with God in his Word.

### **2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

Again, Sunday morning is where all of our family gets together, teens included. This is the best opportunity to connect to fellow Christians. It is overlooked by most. I don't encourage our teens or attempt to get them to associate with other Christians outside of our denomination. I encourage them more to associate with unbelievers so that they can let their light shine in the darkness. There is real danger in encouraging our teens to breathe in the air of false doctrine that is so thick and heavy in other Christian denominations especially at this age. If they have Christian friends, we're not going to stop them, but, as a church, we are not going to actively encourage participation with other Christians outside of our denomination. Within our denomination, we try to do at least one joint activity with other WELS teens in Northern California. Tree of Life Bible camp is held every year in the summer. We also have gone hiking in Yosemite with other teens.

### **3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

Again, I believe the obvious is overlooked. Rather than trying to come up with 101 service projects to do at church, our encouragement to our teens is to recognize the roles into which God has placed them. Then, when they see their place, to know from God's Word what their responsibility is as a citizen in his kingdom within that role. How am I serving God? How am I

serving my neighbor? How do I bring God's Word to the ears of the unbelievers with whom I have contact? How do I bring God's Word to the eyes of unbelievers by my actions? The general epistles are wonderful food for thought for teenagers. They show who God is by nature, what people are by nature, who God has made me as a Christian and what selfless sacrifice he has given me to make as a king and priest in his kingdom. If they are meditating on these things, if they are constantly seeking God's mercy but constantly reassured of his grace, then they assist in the ministry and mission of the church the best. And the only way to get them to see these things is Bible study and worship!

**4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

If they have apprehensions it is because they don't understand their place in God's kingdom. They don't realize what it is to be a royal priesthood. They don't understand their roles. They don't understand God's grace. They don't know themselves very well and they don't know God very well. So again, how do we change that? We teach. We use God's Word and we say, "This is what you are. This is what God is." The more they understand the Kingdom of God and their position as a servant in that Kingdom, they will be apprehensive of what "church" is.

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

Overall, I think our older members have a positive view of the youth. They have seen them come up from infancy on. They promised at the baptisms of these infants who are now teens that they would assist them in remaining a child of God until death. They know that the teens will very soon be the 20-somethings with children who will continue as the next generation of church members. There are inevitably times when the generational gap causes one group or the other to despise the other. Then we gently remind the older generation that they too were teens once and not that much has changed. We remind the younger generation to be humble because the older generation is wise and the teens could learn a thing or two. So we teach with 1 Tim. 4:12 and with 1 Peter 5:5. Have I mentioned that the Word of God is the most important tool in our church's toolbox? If we use it and don't just talk about it, if we really take the time to teach and admonish, then sin is met with forgiveness, short-sightedness is met with aged wisdom and false pride is replaced with humility.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

The parents. The parents. The parents. If the parents are not doing their job, then the elders and the pastor should teach, admonish and encourage them with the Word of God. The pastor also is important because he is the one responsible for delivering God's Word to their minds on Sunday. We have to make sure to preach to every age group seated in front of us. The pastor is also responsible for digging deeply into the Word so that what he preaches and teaches from

confirmation class to Bible class to the pulpit is not just superficial and one-dimensional. He should be the ultimate tour guide who brings out of the treasure house of God's Word gleaming treasures old and new (Matthew 13:52).

**THE WARNING:** If you make the church a social club or a service club, the teens will treat it like every social or service club that they are ever involved in. They will be there for a while and participate, but leave in the end. They won't be lifelong friends and stay in touch with the people they went to high school with (unless they went to a WELS prep perhaps). But if you give them a taste of the Word and teach them who God has made them, then they will always hunger for the Word and look for ways to live their high Christian calling!

## Survey: Pastor #24

### **1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

This is about connecting people to the means of grace. Through encouragement in seventh and eighth grade confirmation we instill a desire to seek the means of grace. Our grade school also plays a major and arguably more critical role in that students get religious instructions for up to 10 years if they start in 4K, even more if they start in our infant childcare. Moving from school, we also have a youth group. Right now, the youth group is a minor affair. We just began it and are starting small. We hope to grow this into a fellowship organization and teen service organization so that there would be more opportunities to connect these kids to the means of grace. Unfortunately, there is no magic bullet here. The means of grace is going to keep these kids connected to the means of grace. We commit them to the Spirit's care and do our best to provide as many opportunities to hear the gospel and participate in Holy Communion.

### **2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

See above for the youth group explanation. We'd really like the youth group to become the de facto hang out for our youth, but that is several years down the road if it's down the road at all. We'd like to see our youth more involved with different ministry activities. There's always some kind of volunteer help needed, why not involve the youth or at least ask for their help?

### **3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

Some join their dads in helping out with ushers. Some assist in helping with the upkeep of the church property. We'd like to get them appropriately involved in worship (for example, instrumentalists, helping with some aspect of the worship service). Our grade school children present God's word in singing throughout the school year as well as in their own Christmas service. They also help serve some of the meals throughout the year and our 7 & 8 grades also are on the church cleaning rotation. The youth are also some of Christ's best spokespeople for the church and school. They go home and witness their faith. They play sports and interact with other people as Christians. Many go on to Wisconsin Lutheran High School and are further equipped for lives of service.

### **4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

I think if this is true it is in part because we haven't asked them. We haven't given them meaningful work within the church to do. We haven't told them what kind of a difference they can make in other people's lives by sharing the gospel, or engaging in a project that promotes the gospel.

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

We have members requesting more youth involvement. That's a positive sign for me. I was called to promote youth ministry within the congregation and we're making headway. I believe our membership desires to see their youth more engaged. And I find it works out well to team up older members with younger ones, though we haven't had much experience with that.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

I believe the pastor would set the tone in the congregation for allowing and atmosphere of permission to exists. But it is far and away the parents who are the greatest predictor of what kind of involvement their teens will have. And there are many factors that the church might have influence over. If parents are struggling because they are making poor financial choices and that's impacting the marriage and family life (to say nothing of their church life) the church can intervene. If a single parent is struggling might the church be a kind of clearinghouse to provide help to this person? What kind of charity might the church provide to families? All of these are ways the church can influence the parent's ability to positively influence their child's life and their involvement in the church.

## Survey: Pastor #25

**1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

We have a youth Bible study during the regular Bible study hour on Sunday mornings. We also have a Youth Group that meets and attends special events and has special outings.

**2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

The main reason for the Youth Group is to keep them connected to one another.

**3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

As part of our Youth Bible study they also work on songs/music for worship and usually sing about every other month in worship. One new thing that we are trying to start this year with our Youth Group is to put together care packages for students in our congregation that are on college and those that serve in the military. The Youth Bible study meets three times a month and then one Sunday a month the teens help the teachers in the Sunday school. The idea is to give them some hands on ministry experience and perhaps plant the seeds for future Sunday school teachers as well either in our congregation, or in another if they move from the area.

**4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

Some of the biggest factors I observe with youth today is that they are pulled in so many different directions. It can be difficult to plan get-togethers and events because everyone has differing and packed schedules. I think there is the perception that they are not really needed for service in the church until you get older (married, have your own family, etc.). We are trying to break that perception both on the part of the teens and on the part of the older members of the congregation.

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

It is very good between the youth and the middle aged members of the congregation. I think it is a work in progress between the retirement age members and the youth. We have a good network of middle aged members that serve as positive influences on our youth and try to show them that they matter.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

The parents. There is a direct connection if the parents of the teen are active in worship and

Bible study and active in the church then the teen is far more likely to be actively connected to the youth Bible study and Youth Group. We reach out to all of our teens and observe that those with parents that are irregular or even inactive in worship might come to a Youth Group outing once or twice, but then drops off after that. If the parents set the example in spiritual leadership the teens are more likely to recognize this is important for life. Youth leaders and the pastor also play a role (even if the pastor is not directly involved in the teen ministry). The leaders of the church and the pastor also needs to show that the teens are important and a valuable part of the body of Christ.



**Survey: Pastor #26**

**1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

- we have 38 students attending KML and support Christian education there
- We have a Christ teens group that has various functions and projects throughout the year.
- They also serve for the Advent and Lenten Dinners
- We send youth to District and National Youth Rallies
- Youth assist with delivering flyers, Christmas for Kids, Easter for Kids,
- VBS
- We have had a youth service for several years, once a year.

**2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

Same activities listed above connect them with fellow teens, not much for unchurched teens though

**3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

see above, also play instruments in worship at times

**4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

I don't know about apprehensions. They are often busy and focused on other things.

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

I think it is positive. They like seeing the youth involved in various programs. Even if the Youth Service was "contemporary" the older ones loved seeing the youth in church participating.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

parents

## Survey: Pastor #27

### **1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

Trinity recognizes the importance of teen ministry and has designated one of our three pastors to take the lead in organizing our ACTS (Active Christian Teen Society) - our teen group. You may want to contact him (Pastor Aaron Christie). We prioritize teens with @ monthly ACTS activities that we publicize via email/bulletin/newsletter/powerpoint with service projects (ref volleyball tournaments, help with babysitting, etc.), Bible studies (we had a weekly break-out group connected with our Multi-generational Bible study that includes teens), and fellowship activities (Packer parties, volleyball games, icebreakers, lock-ins, Miller Park baseball games, etc).

### **2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

Please see above for more details

### **3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

(see above for more details) At Trinity, we seek to involve teens through choir, ushering, participation in special worship services, Evangelism opportunities, teens inviting teens to events, elementary school events, etc.

### **4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

Probably the largest issue is teens are perceiving themselves to be SO BUSY, they don't always have time for ministry in the formal church. And with all the sports/arts/jobs/etc., they are quite busy and the priority of serving in a local congregation isn't a priority. And it even happens in our WELS schools - with area Lutheran High School students and Prep School students seeing that their current body fulfills that need that there isn't much time for the local congregation. We need to work better as leaders of schools and congregations to help personally communicate and support each other in this effort.

### **5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

Every weekend, at least at our congregation, I see much regular interaction between older members and teens. This usually has to do with "familiarity" or friends of the family. I believe the older members, especially the outgoing positive ones, have a very positive impact on our youth. Much more can be done.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

As a parent, church member, and pastor, I believe all three need to work together to weekly pray for, model, and encourage our own teens as well as teens within our congregation to be actively growing in Christ and sharing Him. As parents we need to set a strong example of congregation participation and include them with positive attitudes. As church leaders, we need to seek ways to include and involve our teens along with the others in the congregation to actively serve Christ in meaningful ways. And as pastors, we need to prioritize ongoing contact with teens. But, truly, the parental role is key (they are still the legal guardians and are often tired of the "church battles" of getting the kids to worship each week). Without the parents faithfully modeling faithful attendance at worship, Bible study, and service projects, I'm concerned that our leadership efforts will be ineffective. Together, with faithful attendance at Bible Study, LORD's Supper, and church, the LORD will bless our efforts. It's an issue worth fighting for.

## Survey: Pastor #28

### **1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

One way that I try to keep them connected to Christ is by encouraging them to help out with Sunday School. I do have one teenager that does this with the younger children. I use this to help encourage her in a future ministry, especially perhaps going on to MLC. I do not have a special Bible Class for teens at my church. Some of them do stay for our adult Bible Class on a regular basis.

### **2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

One of our teens helps to usher on a given Sunday. This pushes (if you get my drift) him to talk to other members and even visitors. The youth in my church are also regular in their worship practice, which allows them to see how important worship is. I also try to talk to them on a regular basis. This relationship with the pastor makes them feel like they matter, which leads them to want to volunteer for other things.

### **3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?** Ushering and Sunday School assistants.

### **4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

I think one of the biggest issues is shyness. In my church we only have two teens and the vast majority of the congregation is in their golden years. I think this leads to some apprehension in helping to volunteer. They tend to stick closer to their parents.

### **5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

I believe in my church that it is very good. The older members always try and talk to the teens. They ask them how school is going, how they are doing in sports and how their search for various colleges are going. The older members are always encouraging and go out of their way to say "thank you" when a teenager volunteers.

### **6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

I think it is a time and priority thing. Peer pressure can also play a role in it. I think our teens need to surround themselves with positive role models. It also helps if parents play an important role and show that church is a priority in their lives.

## Survey: Pastor #29

**1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

We have small groups geared for teens - teen led and only teens attend. We also use a ton of young people in our music - they play a ton of instruments. We also use teens for lighting, and filming, editing things for worship

**2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

We have fellowship after worship - and we have a lot of young people. Everyone is just connected - it is kind of built into our culture.

**3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

We do a ton of music - all different kids. We have kids that play violins, guitars, upright bass, drums, etc... even singing. We also do a ton of videos - announcements, shorts, etc... Teens have a better grasp on technology than adults often do. We use them for things like this.

**4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

At the risk of sounding arrogant or a know it all - we don't have this problem. Our teens one being at worship and getting involved.

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

We are a family and for the most part we all get along. I think that our young adults (teens) turn to our older adults for mentorship and guidance quite often. So it is a positive.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

Depends on the area of ministry that we are trying to connect them. But I can also tell you that it starts from the top down. So I push that pretty hard and model it.

## Survey: Pastor #30

### **1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

We have called a Staff Minister and have given him the job title of “Family/Youth Minister.” He is a former WELS teacher and does an outstanding job with our teens conducting Bible Classes on Sunday mornings for them and various activities throughout the year in which he incorporates the Word of God into a variety of activities. He also stays in touch with them through Facebook and other social networks.

### **2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

The teens are always included in fellowship activities at church. Most recently many of them helped with our Fall Festival preparing and helping the little children with a variety of games. The Fall Festival is like a carnival in which we invite friends and others to worship with us on Reformation Sunday and then enjoy a meal and other activities.

Our teens sometimes invite their friends from the community to join them at one of our teen functions and this becomes an opportunity to witness to them the message of Christ.

They participate with our sister WELS congregation in Irmo (Columbia) SC for lock-ins at least once a year. Often times there are teens from other WELS congregations in our circuit included as well. Some of the teens have attended district and synod youth rallies.

### **3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

They have done yard work at some of our older member’s homes. They have participated in a hunger strike program at church to help food shelters for the homeless. One of our teens was injured when falling off a horse and our Youth Minister arranged an evening of board game activities for many of the teens to enjoy at the girl’s home. It was much appreciated by the family. The teens are included in the singing when the Sunday School children sing and they seem to enjoy this! They also continue to participate in the Christmas Eve children’s service and from time to time the teen girls will sing an arrangement during the worship service. The young men serve as ushers. They have put on skits for the congregation in the past.

### **4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church’s ministry?**

Our teens attend many different schools in the area. Very few attend the same institution. So, the less active teens in the congregation do go along with their friends to other teen activities. The teens will go where their friends are. It is important for us that our teens bond with one another in the congregation so that they look forward to seeing each other at church. We are in a largely Baptist community and the Baptists are great at planning teen activities!

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

It seems to me that there is a good relationship between the teens and the older members. It is not uncommon to see older members chatting with teens after a worship service.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

Parents play a big role. Even though peer pressure seems to be huge at this time in one's life, an encouraging parent can do a lot to keep a teen involved in the congregation.

## Survey: Pastor #31

### **1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

For 25 years I agonized with this question and tried all kinds of approaches, special Bible classes, discussion groups, social and athletic activities. In the end God allowed only a partial success. In these later years of my ministry God has put me in a very unique situation. He called me to an island mission in the Caribbean. The average Grenadian is just 21, a very young population. Because we had so few adult male members I chose to spend a much greater time disciplining teens. After four years God is blessing us in ways he never did in the US, at least so far. I am convinced that two things in particular has made a difference: I spend much more time personally mentoring and teaching them and secondly they have a much greater voice and role in our ministry than they ever did in the US.

### **2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

We have weekly Bible study and/or activities in a variety of situations. We try to find and encourage mentors but this is a challenge as we don't have many adults. What we are able to do is work much harder and help teens bond with each other.

### **3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

Our young people help with worship musically each week both instrumentally and musically. They also help me put together the plan for worship each week. We also have two young people on our council. They clean our church weekly and monthly take on service projects. They have become our primary evangelist. They usually work as liaisons with incoming US ministry teams. Several of our youth have been granted junior college scholarships to prepare for teaching and ministry programs.

### **4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church' ministry?**

The youth that do not come usually do not have transport and their parents can't afford to send them. Many of them walk anyway. The ones that do not come think the church is lame and they would much rather be tough thugs or sexy; well you get the idea.

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?** The relationship is sometimes strained and other times very positive. I find the older members want the youth to come and they see them as the future of our church, but they do not want to do things their way. They prefer what is comfortable. On the other hand,



when adult members are welcoming and positive and make an effort to work with the youth in a non-patronizing way, amazing growth happens on both sides.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

I used to think the parents. But now I am not so sure. Teens are looking for a way to express independence from parents. Few of the parents of our teens are active in our ministry. I think at that age their peers play the biggest role in getting them into church and keeping them there. I do not, of course, mean to imply that the Holy Spirit plays any less of a role and is essential no matter what other factors come into play.

## Survey: Pastor #32

### **1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

All the normal stuff; Worship, Sunday School, etc. We've tried pretty hard to have them active in helping or even teaching VBS. We've tried – with very limited success – to do fun stuff. Most of them are just so busy that trying to plan something doesn't work much. We've had limited success keeping them in their own SS class.

### **2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

There are no WELS congregations near us – Closest one is 70 miles away. So mostly it's just trying to keep them connected together through the things mentioned above.

### **3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

Teaching VBS and some SS. Ushering. They're always invited/encouraged to take part in outreach events and sometimes they come and help (we often pass out flyers inviting people to worship and other events). Right now I have two teen girls who are babysitting for a family in BIC. A couple others play instruments in worship about once/6 weeks or so. Basically we try to treat our teens as adults. They also are invited to play on our church softball team, and many of them do, which builds inter-generational relationships.

### **4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

Haven't ever perceived any apprehensions. Schedule is more often the problem. Our teens are really busy – they're in sports, drama, working, etc., so just getting their time is the biggest challenge.

### **5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

I've had several very positive relationships develop between older/younger members. One single mom's son plays drums; an adult male member (who plays guitar almost every Sunday and sometimes organizes a few other guys to play along) has taken him under his wing and encouraged/trained him, helped him to take responsibility for coming to practice, etc.

Another member is a parole officer. She has become quite close with one of our teen girls who was just going through some of the "stuff" that teen girls go through. I do try to intentionalize some of that, if there seems to be a need or the personalities seem to make sense.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

Obviously, first and foremost, God. After that it's PARENTS, PARENTS, PARENTS, PARENTS, PARENTS, PARENTS, PARENTS, PARENTS, PARENTS. (Sense a theme??? :- ) ) If the parent's aren't on board, it's pretty hard to do any kind of teen ministry, in my opinion. When the parents are into the word, I'm not sure that any specific teen ministry is needed; I think that simply treating them as adults at that point opens up lots of doors for them.

### Survey: Pastor #33

**1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

Some of the teens are still part of our Head 2 Heart group which includes catechism instruction and hands-on service opportunities. We have several dedicated lay leaders who lead a high-school aged Bible study discussion and an extension of the Head 2 Heart program on Sunday mornings. Additionally one of our Spiritual Care Team (Elders) members has taken on the task of calling and encouraging our teens to be a part of Sunday worship and Bible study.

**2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

We have begun regular (monthly) outside-of-church outings. Additionally we are trying to team up with the teen groups of neighboring congregations to have some bigger events.

**3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

Some help with ushering and "tech booth" on Sunday mornings. We hold an annual soccer camp and the coaching/small group discussion is done primarily by our teens. Other things have been discussed but haven't been implemented to this point.

**4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

I don't know that I can answer that question very well. That's probably a good first sign. I don't know the teens as well as I should.

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth?**

Overall I think it is cordial, but I wouldn't describe it as close or overly encouraging. Right now we are trying one small thing to show the teens we care - giving them a dedicated and re-furnished meeting area. Of course, maybe that is perceived as, "Leave us alone and do your own thing over in the corner." We'll see. Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth? It probably goes both ways.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

Parental involvement is huge. Participation by friends is also big.

### Survey: Pastor #34

**1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

We have started a youth ministry program. In the program the teens meet on Sunday for Teen Bible Study and then on Wednesday night for what we call G.Y.M, Goodview Youth Ministry. They study Scripture both times and on Wednesdays have time to do other things too.

**2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

Our teens help with outreach projects and canvassing. Most of them attend Luther High School so they see each other quite a bit at school.

**3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

Like in #2, they help with outreach projects and with canvassing. Many also assist in our video ministry which oversees the audio visual equipment we have for powerpoint, mixing boards, remote cameras and the DVR.

**4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

They are too busy with sports, their friends. Mom and Dad don't do anything, why should they. Lack of confidence.

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

The older members love the youth. I'm not sure the younger members love the older members the same way.

Older members do have somewhat of a positive influence on the youth, but the youth won't say that.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

Hands on. Contemporary. Fits into their lives.

### Survey: Pastor #35

**1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

Our congregation has a youth group ( high school age and beyond) that is active and meets every other week. We alternate between a Bible class at Church and an activity outside of Church. We do this to do both in reach as well as outreach.

**2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?**

We have a youth group face book that is linked to our congregation created by one of our teens. Any upcoming activity is put on FB for our group. Our congregation is always looking for ways to keep our teens involved as much as possible.

**3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

This year our Christmas program is being done with the cooperation of our youth group. Our youth also are involved in participating in our Worship choirs, helping with the music for liturgy, etc.

**4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

Some of their reasons are they get busy with work; they maybe don't always feel as connected to the ministry of the congregation.

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

Our relationship between our youth and the adults is a very good one. We have two adult counselors who promote our youth group to our congregation and help them understand the value of having a youth group and the many blessings this brings.

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

That they feel they belong and are appreciated and can be an integral part to it's ministry.

## Survey: Pastor #36

### **1. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to Christ?**

I'll answer the first two questions together. In the congregations: weekly "Jugendstunden": biblical themes and themes that are of interest for them, answering questions, enjoying fellowship; in general: since the congregations are small, it is essential for the pastor to have a good contact to the teenagers of the congregation - that pays off.

In the synod: twice a year "Jugendtreffen" for all teenagers of ELFK from Friday night until Sunday afternoon. 1 theme (for example topics like church fellowship, 6th commandment, being a Christian teenager in this world ...). 3 presentations, besides: bible workshops, workshops connected to the theme, ...; participation: between 65 and 120 teenagers every summer: retreats (1 week) across Germany and Europe with bible studies, devotions, services and so on; for different ages since last year: contacts to sister churches in Scandinavia grow stronger, we have guests at our retreats and meetings from there and we'll have a retreat in 2012 in Sweden, where as many teenagers and young members of CELC-churches in Europe (and even from WELS) will gather for a week and have fellowship; see: <https://www.facebook.com/godsplan4u>

### **2. What are some ways in which you/your church attempt to keep the teenagers of your congregation connected to fellow Christians (inside and/or outside of your congregation)?** cf. above

### **3. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?**

As a youth pastor I don't do the work alone but I have a "Jugendteam/J-Team" - 7 youths between 16 and 26 of age; they have better contacts to the teenagers, come up with good ideas and good team spirit - and they know, that we're working for the Lord. How do young people in the congregation assist in the ministry and mission of the church?· Of course: depends on how many youths there are. In my congregation for example: I have 4 teenagers. Others have 20.

### **4. If young people shy away from being active in the church, what seem to be some apprehensions they have in staying away from the church's ministry?**

They can't identify with the "strict course" of our fellowship, especially in the topics of church fellowship (prayer fellowship, attending services of other churches outside of CELC), role of man and woman in public and church – so they are not interested in participating. Often they are too busy with other activities like sports, school, music (bands, orchestras) or activities with friends· Quite some teenagers have the feeling that ELFK and confessional Lutheranism is too "cold", because we don't put the emphasis on feelings. That is quite a challenge for our youth work.

**5. What do you perceive the relationship is like between the older members of the congregation and the youth? Do you believe the older members have a positive or negative influence on the youth?**

In my congregations the relationship is pretty good. The old members are glad that there are young members active at all. The young ones know what the older ones sacrificed during the last decades to keep the congregation alive. I think this fits the situation of our synod in general as well. Because we are such a small synod, the feeling of being a family is pretty strong. Most members know that we will only have future when young and old get along as Christian brothers and sisters. Concerning the influence of the old guys on the young guns? I'd say: both sides: positive in being role models concerning the readiness to make sacrifices in time, money and talents for the work in God's Kingdom positive in expressing their joy when they see that young people become active in faith and congregation – that gives new motivation to the young members. Sometimes positive in supporting ideas and initiatives that come up from young minds (in my congregation: the young members wanted to have a nativity play – old members supported it strongly, gave money for costumes, built scenery, ...)o sometimes negative in rejecting ideas from the younger ones (changing liturgy once a while, new songs).

**6. Who do you think plays the biggest factor in the teens' participation in the church?**

First: a personal relation to the faith in Jesus Christ. Those who just learned for confirmation and religion class will not participate. And if they do, only reluctant. If they experience that our faith is a living thing, giving hope, comfort and strength, they are ready to participate. Second: they have to identify with the synod and congregation they are members of – that does not mean that they have to agree with everything. But the need to have the wish to be active because it is THEIR church/congregation. Third: we must show them that their activity and participation is highly appreciated, that the grownups listen to them, that they CAN change some stuff – otherwise there will be frustration. Fourth: they need a strong connection to youths from other congregations and churches of our fellowship. In this way they become friends with young members from other congregations – they stay in contact via social media – and look forward to the next possibility to meet: Jugendstunde, Jugendtreffen, other church dates – there they talk, text, experience spiritual life in other congregations - then they have ideas.