



Making Space For Young People *Congregational Resources*

Compiled by members of the Youth Ministry Team
of the Northern Great Lakes Synod

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Introduction

We have all heard the remark, “Young people don’t come to church anymore.”

We have all heard the gentler questions, “Where are the kids?”

And, if you are looking into this resource, you might have even asked the question, “How do we get more young people into our congregation?”

This resource book offers no solutions or magic pills, but serves as a reminder about what church has always been about: making space for all of God’s people through invitation and community. Young people in our congregations do not need gimmicks or flashy attractions. They need us to uplift them, teach them, and give them tools to have a relationship with a God who loves them beyond measure. We, as congregations, have been called to this essential work. We have been called to be trustworthy and reliable teachers, caregivers, and community in the lives of young people.

We hope these resources give you ideas and grow your imagination for what invitation into church community looks like at all ages. This list is not exhaustive. It also may have ideas that don’t work in your setting. We pray this resource might inspire you anyway and reveal the ways God has equipped your context with the gifts to care for all people, including our youngest.

Finally, we pray for you. You have taken the time to look through this resource booklet in hopes of cultivating a community where young people thrive, feel safe, and know their belovedness. Whether you are a parent, youth leader, pastor, or member of the congregation looking to foster a new sense of invitation, this resource was prepared with you in mind. You have our gratitude and our prayers. No one does this work alone.

Peace,

Pastor Lily Brondyke and Charlotte Strom

On behalf of the NGLS Youth Ministry Team

Helpful Hints for Youth Ministry in Any Context

Pray

Everything we do must be grounded in prayer and relationship with God. Here are some prompts to get your prayers going:

- Pray for each child/youth. Pray that you will see them as God sees them and that they will fill your heart with love for them.
- Pray for their parents, that they will love and be an example for their children, especially in faith-related things.
- Pray for your pastor, leaders, and volunteers. Pray for wisdom for them, for love for the children/youth. Pray for their families, that they won't suffer.
- Ask God to give you insight into what the ministry needs, where it's at, and what the biggest issues are. Pray that your ears and your heart will be open to all signals.
- Pray for yourself; for strength and wisdom to lead and serve well.

Have a Goal

Why are you doing this? Is your goal able to be measured? Does your goal have impact?

It is tempting to view numbers as markers of success but a different metric could be more effective to gauge the success of youth ministry in your setting. How connected do your young people feel to your community? Can the little ones in your congregation tell you their favorite Bible story? Do adults feel connected to the kids in your setting?

Do a Few Things Really Well

It might be tempting to try and keep up with the youth schedules of larger settings. Focus on what works well for you in your setting. Doing a handful of events well or providing a few well thought out opportunities will have a more lasting impact than a busy schedule.

Communicate

Use newsletters, social media, group texts, and reminders to keep people informed about what is happening. Folks are inundated with information and schedules. Give families an opportunity to make plans to include events in their calendar.

Helpful Hints for Youth Ministry in Any Context

Write It Down

Keep track of what worked and what did not work. Sustainable ministry endeavors can be passed down and improved upon by others. Take time after each event or class to record how things worked.

Be Patient and Trust in what God is Doing

Relationships and communities take a long time to build. This work takes patience and resilience. God is at work loving us and transforming our hearts to do God's will. Take heart, have faith, and use the network of people around you. Together as the Church, we have been called and equipped to care for the young people in our congregations. The good news is that God is already doing this work.

Thanks be to God that we get to join in this life changing ministry!

AUGUST

Back to School Blessing

This can be done in a multitude of ways. Some congregations bless backpacks and give keychains to remind kids of their blessing while others give devotions for families to complete at home.

School Supply Drive

Collect school supplies prior to the start of the school year. Encourage youth to make the invitation to the congregation to donate items, and empower them to help find the best place to donate them, whether it be to those in need within the congregation or a local nonprofit.

SEPTEMBER

Youth-Led Worship

Invite youth to fill the roles that they see adults fill all year long! Ushers, readers, greeters, and communion assistants are just some of the many options.

Sunday School Blessing

Create an opportunity for your congregation to bless all those who are involved in your Sunday School programming - teachers, helpers, and students!

God's Work. Our Hands.

This day is an opportunity to celebrate who we are as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America – one church, freed in Christ to serve and love our neighbor. More information about this annual day can be found at elca.org.

Bible Faith Milestone

Pick an age to gift Bibles to young people as a congregation. Invite adults or parents to pick out a verse for their child from the Bible. Celebrate in worship!

OCTOBER

Confirmation

Have a Confirmation breakfast for confirmands and their families hosted by Church Council members.

No confirmation students? Have a church bonfire and invite families to make s'mores, carve pumpkins, and worship camp-style around the fire!

Pet Blessing

Invite the community to bring their pets and bless them around October 4th (Feast Day of Saint Francis of Assisi)! Depending on your congregational setting, this might be best done outside.

NOVEMBER

Pie Fellowship

Host a luncheon or coffee hour and encourage people to bring their favorite pie recipe ahead of Thanksgiving.

LWR Kits

Create an event around packing Lutheran World Relief Kits with youth and their families.

Service Project

Make tie blankets with your congregation and donate them to a local charity.

Deer Day Blessing

Bless all of the hunters before they go out and try their luck during Deer Season.

DECEMBER

Advent Wreath Making Workshop

Pajama Worship on Christmas Morning

Caroling

Take your youth group caroling and stop at local nursing homes or the homes of your homebound congregation members.

Christmas Program

There are a multitude of different Christmas programs to choose from! Choose an option that suits your numbers and the time you have available. or invite kids and families to help write an original script based on the talents within your group.

JANUARY

Pre-Valentine's Day

Have a Valentine's Day Card Making Table at your Annual Meeting: Have kids make Valentine's Day cards for homebound members.

Ice Skating/Sledding Day

Invite your congregation to the local tubing hill or skate rink and have fun together!

Blessing a Dwelling at Epiphany

Invite youth to bless the church building each year using chalk to write the year and initials of the three wiseman above a door. A service template can be found in Sundays and Seasons or by searching online.

FEBRUARY

Valentine's Day

Invite families to deliver the Valentine cards and flowers to homebound members or residents of a local nursing home!

When Lent begins, have kids help you “Bury your Alleluia” banner!

MARCH

Involve kids in your Holy Week services! Make it clear that the invitation to Holy Week is for them too! Incorporate skits, songs, and illustrations that make worship accessible to children.

Have butterflies, Easter Lily, and other Easter coloring sheets available. Invite kids to color these sheets and then use them as decorations throughout your sanctuary in the Easter season.

Soup Suppers

Invite youth and families to help prepare soup, serve, and/or clean up after Lenten Soup Suppers.

Bedecking the Cross

Collect leftover flowers from a local funeral home. Prepare a cross with chicken wire or a screen that covers the cross. Invite kids to insert flowers into the wire to transform a dead cross into a flower extravaganza!

First Communion

Hold First Communion classes to prepare young people for this sacrament. Include activities such as baking bread or creating cups out of clay.

APRIL

Intergenerational Service Project:

-Spring Cleaning the Church

-LWR Packing Kits

-Planting Flowers at Church

-Tie Blankets

MAY

Graduation Blessing

Bless your graduates as they move into the next stage of their life. If your congregation has a quilting group, perhaps invite them to make a quilt for each graduate.

Sunday School Party

Celebrate the end of the Sunday school year with a party! Invite families to celebrate with their youth.

SUMMER MONTHS

Going to Camp Blessing

Encourage your youth to attend a Christian summer camp over the summer! Invite youth who are going to camp to be blessed by the congregation ahead of their trip.

Flat Jesus

Make "Flat Jesus" with your kids and send them home with them for the summer. Encourage them to take Flat Jesus with them on their summer adventures, and to take lots of pictures too!

Vacation Bible School

Work with people in your congregation, join together with other churches, or invite summer camp staff to help lead Vacation Bible School for the children in your community.

Helpful Resources

www.illustratedministry.com

www.sundaysandseasons.com (be sure to look under the Children's bulletin tab)

www.dskidsermons.com

www.augsburgfortress.com (under books for Children)

<https://www.ministrylinks.online/>

<https://www.wearesparkhouse.org/>

<https://faithink.com/the-faith5-steps> FAITH5™: The Five Steps — Faith Inkubators

www.GodlyPlayFoundation.org Godly Play

<https://theconfirmationproject.com/> The Confirmation Project