

***A Practical Approach
to Impacting Today's Youth:
Reach, Teach, and Touch Their
Lives***

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***April 28, 2009
10:45 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.***

***Transcending Boundaries:
Improving The Health of our Community
a CNYHSA Conference***

Holiday Inn ---- Liverpool, NY

Schedule

10:45 – 11:00

**Welcome
Prayer
Ice Breaker**

11:00 – 11:45

**Introduction of workshop
Workshop Dialogue**

11:45 – 12:00

Summarize

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Introduction

This morning we are here to have an open dialogue on suggestions for reaching, teaching, and touching the lives of youth in our community.

Because this is a faith-based conference, we will focus on ways to recruit

and retain youth in our churches.

Youth are spiritual gifts from God. We, the parents, aunts, uncles, teachers, community leaders, and pastors are responsible for our youth's

development. Scripture teaches us to train up a child in the way that they

should go and when they are grown they won't depart from it.

You know when we want to train for athletic activities we must train a lot

and often. We must work with our youth in that same diligent vain.

Training our youth takes time, dedication, energy, continued practice and vision.

During our interaction with them we can learn about the values, world

views, spiritual beliefs, and spiritual practices of our young people.

This

handout sites some topics for dialogue for us today.

Becoming Familiar with our Youth

(a) From a practical point of view, strive to build on the following features:

- Responsibility
- Trust
- Independence
- Respect
- Real life experiences
- Expertise
- Focus on their strengths (what they're good at OR would like to be good at)

(b) Present new opportunities for personal independence through the church:

- Preparing for a driver's license
- Applying for a job
- Appropriate attire for an interview
- Have a mock interview to develop interviewing skills
- Encourage volunteering and helping someone in need
- Exposure (traveling)

CURRENT PRACTICES

1. Community Collaborations

What has worked for some communities is the ability for **youth** to help youth organizations link more with communities, professional development, and opportunities. These community-level linkages have lead to youth empowerment, higher self-esteem, and improved interaction between fellow youth and their communities. Collaborations with schools, universities, and other youth organizations provide support for engaging youth in the church.

2. Development of Youth Leadership

Youth engagement creates youth leadership. The possibilities of fresh ideas, community experience, and dedication of young people make them positive change agents and the next generation of leaders for the community. Society has a responsibility to change our views of young people. When we view them as irresponsible we create a barrier to youth leadership work in the home, community, and church.

Christians can provide opportunities that help our youth understand themselves and their significance. As they serve their needs are met and their gifts are discovered and developed. The bible teaches "that we are fearfully and wonderfully made".

Opportunities include:

- Youth activities at the church (for members and non-members)
- Designating a Sunday (Worship day) for youth to preach/speak, pray, sing, usher, etc.
- Positions on the church's board for them

Engaging youth in activities like speaking in public, and working on and managing projects helps youth build self-esteem and improves effective communication. This way they are making a difference in their own lives.

Excitement about church attendance

Ask the youth what excites them. Some responses might include:

- ✓ More freedom from parents and family
- ✓ Being allowed to attend parties
- ✓ Driving a car
- ✓ Traveling
- ✓ Having greater control over their relationships
- ✓ Having a girlfriend or boyfriend

Some suggestions for church involvement in what excites them is to:

- ✓ Implement etiquette classes
-- prepare dinner, teach how to set a table, which side to serve from, etc.)
- ✓ Host a formal dance
 - Teach appropriate behavior (holding the door, take off hat inside, pulling out chair for young ladies, etc.)
- ✓ Have ballroom dancing classes
- ✓ Provide fun activities they can relate to and appreciate

The church leaders are in a position to help our young people understand and connect with the language and culture of the church. Perhaps a youth pastor can help them to understand the scriptures and apply them to their daily lives. Youth influencing youth can increase church attendance. Encourage participation in activities and services of the church by assigning specific roles which allows them to contribute to the **life and growth of the church**. In other words, provide experiences that positively impact maturity.

Be aware of changes in the Lives of Young People

Significant life experiences such as a serious accident, illness within the family, or seeing a friend get gunned down has had various kinds of impact on young people's beliefs and practices. For instance, sometimes these experiences have led young men and women to become much more aware of what was happening to themselves and those around them. The challenge of these experiences will draw some into new levels of maturity.

This role of experience can have major impacts on their journey of faith. Some will have their faith challenged and/or deepened by difficult experiences such as personal sickness or the death of a friend or family member. Increased involvement in churches generally is associated with formal involvement, perhaps, through music. However, for others these experiences cause their faith to become more meaningful. In contrast, others faith and involvement in the church could lose whatever relevance it once had.

Most importantly, we must make church experience relevant to the lives of our young people.

3. Engagement of Diverse Communities

Youths' work with communities other than their own builds teamwork and assists in problem solving, but most importantly, encourages them to learn, understand, and accept one another's cultures. Each community, neighborhood, or household can have its own unique culture.

The church can make a positive impact in the lives of our youth by buying into the belief that we need to promote hope, bring people together, and work on challenging and important issues. One example is gun violence and the belief by some young people that they are invincible.

Focusing on diversity plays an important role in developing youths' ability to find commonality with fellow youth from other communities. Once common ground is established, friendships can be formed between groups and individuals. We need to involve youth who are generally untouched.

4. Adult-Youth Partnerships

- Take youth's involvement seriously. Acknowledge them as contributors and decision makers.
- Don't make decisions about them without them
- Know that if you don't trust their abilities they will sense that and any pre-existing feelings of unworthiness and abandonment can become intensified
- Be willing to support and guide
- When working with youth, you must accept the responsibility associated with the title. If you don't have the time to be a mentor, don't volunteer to be one
- Adults bring a great amount of education, resources, and expertise that is beneficial to the youth's learning process
- Youth bring a fresh approach, energy, and curiosity, which gives adults the opportunity to approach work with a different perspective
- It is beneficial for adults to see youth as leaders
- Barriers can be broken down between adults and youth by adults being devoted to them and not just the youth project
- Remember, nothing is impossible in the eyes of our youth

Desired Practices

(a) Increased Youth Opportunities

- Involve youth **beyond the church's doors**; visit the sick at home or in nursing homes and hospitals, visit the jails, volunteer at a food bank, shovel a walkway for the elderly. This allows them to have real world experiences and make legitimate contributions to their community where they see needs relevant to their own lives.
- Plan a college tour road trip or visit a local college. Youth will one day be in key positions. It is critical to give them the opportunity to experience areas where they might not traditionally have access.
- Encourage their participation in the civic life of the community. Help them

become involved in community problem solving. Advocate for them to have a place at the table in an influential organization or institution. Young organizers need to be in vocal, upfront leadership roles.

(b) Effective Practices Promotion

- The more youth are seen and heard the more people will recognize their positive impact.
- Have a core group of **youth train** other **youth**
- Those working with youth need to work to get more visibility for them. This will change how youth are viewed and treated in mainstream society. It will also affect organizational structures, making them more youth-friendly.
- Gaining media coverage and marketing will show the importance and true impact of youth programs plus add visibility and value

(c) Increased Diversity Focus

- Interview **youth** on gang violence, HIV/AIDS, **church conferences**, etc.
- Recruit and engage the **not always chosen youth!**
- Advocate for our youth by educating, as well as helping community members understand and support youth-related issues
- Be aware that our churches have traditions and customs that someone from the outside wouldn't be familiar with. As we train our youth we empower them to move from one community to another
- Our community's most under-utilized resource is our youth. Their skills, insight, creativity, and talent are all God-given abilities.
- Advocating for, training, and involving our youth has the potential to create more focused well rounded youth, as well as, create funds to support youth programming
- Tapping into our **youth's abilities** sets the stage for greater impact in the home, community and church.
- Collaborations aide in the success of **youth-focused programs**

Recommendations

1. Promote and Disseminate Learning

Train individuals interested in engaging youth in philanthropy. Establish a commission that would house information, generate visibility, organize conferences, conduct training and development exercises, build credibility, and add voice to the mission of youth engagement. Creating this “portal” would bridge a significant knowledge gap.

2. Increase Diversity Focus of Youth Philanthropy

Engage youth in community building and help them learn to work together. Youth programs need to be focused on skills and ethics youth will have with them tomorrow...not just keep them alive today. The loyalty of groups working together toward a difficult community goal just can't be beat. It builds ethics and creates intentional opportunities for our youth.

Summary

Our dialogue today suggests that **young people are searching for genuine experiences**, especially those involving family and friends. Thus, while family and friends attend church and young people feel they can contribute to the life of a church through a given role and duties to perform, they find their involvement more meaningful. The flip side is that if family and friends do not attend, if the young person's goals are oriented around working and playing sports, and if they are not familiar with the language and culture of a church, it may be hard for them to be drawn into the collective worship experience.

Young people can show great interest in making decisions for themselves and in being independent in relation to their beliefs, their values, and their practices. To have a constructive role in the growth of young people **churches**, parents, schools, and community organizations have to respect their desire for autonomy and **engage in dialogue**.

Appendix:
Suggestions for Recruiting and Retaining Youth in our Churches

Look at your targeted youth population and youth programs that have worked in other churches

Determine what has and what hasn't worked in your church

Look at what has had an impact and what hasn't

Decide what more you would like to see done in the youth movement.

Talk to persons in the community, foundations, and organizations to garner additional ideas and support

Prepare for the future. How do you see youth programs becoming more impactful?

Build innovative programs that will have sustainable impact based on positive community change!!!

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