



definition of effective
youth and family ministry
a working document
ver. 1.2; may 14, 2008

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Effective Youth and Family Ministry in ELCA congregations is:

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|-----------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Discipleship | 6. Cross Generational |
| 2. Baptismal | 7. Advocacy |
| 3. Rooted | 8. Congregational |
| 4. Excellence | 9. Connected |
| 5. Welcoming | 10. Partnership |

In conversations about the future of the ELCA Youth Ministry Network, and the future of youth and family ministry in general, one thing became clear: There is no common language. We have no familiar, widespread way of talking about what we do, our goals, our vision and of God's mission lived out in ministry alongside young people.

So the Network set out to craft a common definition, a way of our thinking together about what it is to be effective in our ministry with young people and their families. Some observations:

1. **It is not a final document.** We don't think it will ever be a final document. Rather, it is a call to a churchwide conversation about the ministry we share. The version you hold in your hand is version 1.2. After we circulated version 1.0, we received lots of great input and critique. Much of that feedback is reflected in this revised version. We hope for continued feedback on this version that will inform future editions.
2. **It makes some assumptions:** It assumes that ministry centers around relationships, both human and divine. Ultimately, in our ministry we seek to develop relationships with young people because we believe that Christ is present in those relationships, and we believe that Christ calls us into these relationships. It assumes that youth and family ministry is adults and young people accompanying each other in the faith journey. It assumes that as faith is strengthened, capacity for leadership is developed. There are probably other assumptions that we haven't even recognized yet. Please help us to name them.
3. **This is a foundational document for a much larger vision.** Largely out of this work, we have established four large goals for the Network: 1) that the Network establish standards and guidelines for adults who work with young people as professionals or volunteers; 2) that the Network become a "Network of Networks," drawing together resource providers, publishing houses, educators and their institutions and more; 3) that people are connected with dynamic training, and that where it is not available, we help to create it; 4) that new partnerships continue to be formed. More information on this vision can be found at www.elcaymnet.org/vision.
4. **We are in this together.** This document is not a product of the Network. It is owned by all of us in this community of people who share this call. Our hope is that in your smaller, local conversations, you can discuss it, tear it apart, agree with parts of it, disagree with parts of it. The only thing we ask is that you share your feedback. This will be essential in continuing the process. Feedback can be posted in the discussion boards at www.elcaymnet.org, or can be e-mailed to vision@elcaymnet.org.

Thank you for your partnership in this vital process!



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Effective Youth and Family Ministry is: Discipleship

Statement: Effective Youth and Family Ministry is adults and young people walking alongside each other in relationship as both grow and mature in faith in Christ.

Biblical Basis: *"Therefore, let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity"*
- Hebrews 6:1

Rationale: Maturity in Christ is a journey, not a destination. The reality is, the entire life process from birth to death is a process of maturation. There is never a point when we suddenly are "complete." There is never a point when our relationship with Jesus Christ has become one of full maturity. We only achieve this point when through death in this life, by the grace of God, we are reunited with God in a new life. There, we experience this maturity.

So what happens in the space between? How do God's people grow towards maturity in Christ as they live their life journey?

This is a faith experience we call discipleship.

As Lutherans, we tend to shy away from this word. It has echoes of "works righteousness" that scare us away. To be a disciple is to take action within our faith, and anything that causes us to take action might be confused by some as action required for the grace of God. We know, however, that discipleship is not so much about what we "do" as Christians, but who we "are" as Christians. Living out our baptismal promises, we become followers of the living God and at the same time, leaders in the world around us. We receive God's grace and share God's love.

In Jewish tradition, rabbis took disciples who followed the rabbi, learned from the rabbi, and modeled their lives and ministry after the rabbi. In Christian practice, Jesus Christ is our rabbi, and as Christians, we try to follow, learn from, and model ourselves after Him.

Effective youth and family ministry then, is the tending of these faith journeys, on behalf of and alongside the lives and faith of young people and their families. We do not take disciples, nor do we create them. We walk alongside the called, and build relationships with, teach, and tend those who are on the discipleship journey. We do this by encouraging and teaching the disciplines of prayer, service, worship, scripture, and faith talk and traditions.

Effective youth and family ministry addresses both the young person as an individual and the young person in the context of their family. It recognizes that their family, whatever that looks like, is the primary incubator for faith. It works to equip parents be the primary faith role models, and provides opportunities for families to "practice faith" together.

Discipleship is less though about what we do and more about what God is doing in the lives of people. It is about naming God's grace and work in the lives of young people. It is occasionally about "nudging" young people and families in their lives and faith. It is by continuing and encouraging the process of discipleship and faith formation that God's transformative grace can become understood in the lives of God's people.



Effective Youth and Family Ministry is: Baptismal

Statement: Effective youth and family ministry focuses on the promises of the God who calls us unconditionally into the relationship begun when we are claimed in the waters of baptism and lived out in the calling of our vocation.

Biblical Basis: *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."*
- 1 Peter 2:9

Rationale: The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is slowly beginning to look more like a melting pot of humanity, less like a weekly reunion of people with Northern European ancestry. Along with the rich diversity of people sitting in the pews of our churches and gathering as youth groups and children's ministries comes a kaleidoscope of cultures and traditions, and an increasingly eclectic theology of who we are and how we see God at work in our midst.

While we celebrate the truth that God is at work in all Christian Churches, as Lutherans we center on the ministry of Word and Sacrament¹. Sacramentally, we understand that our identity is woven into the promises received and gifts given in baptism. Youth and family ministry that is effective rotates around the promises of grace, forgiveness, eternal life, identity and community, and the gifts which through the Holy Spirit bring and sustain life to all.



This has absolutely nothing to do with us. It has everything to do with God, with God's love, mercy, and grace. God initiates the relationship. It is effective because of God's grace in Jesus!

First, as professionals and volunteers in youth and family ministry, we have the privilege of entering into the brokenness of life with young people, and to accompany them as they experience God's grace, receive the gifts, and are restored in and through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Second, we enter into relationship with the young person, their family, and their entire support system, making a covenant together to become the village that literally raises this child. And so we accompany and support the ministry of parents by walking alongside them as they experience the joys and struggles of raising their young people. We provide resources, we teach the children, and we teach the parents how to be church together.

Finally, we represent the church which fully embraces and welcomes the young into the mission of God, and equips them to live out and to share the grace of the God who loves them first and foremost.

Our call is counter cultural. Many of these youth have been conditioned to believe that their value is defined by performance in the home, at school, at church, in relationships in every arena of their lives. And we remind them that they are justified not by what they do, but through the love and grace of God. Along with the body of Christ, they are all sinners...all saints...and all justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Our baptism as infants, children, youth, or adults makes us heirs of that promise.

How important is our baptism? Jesus' final command in the book of Matthew is to *"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."* Equally important though is to remember that this command is wrapped inside a promise: *"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* (Matthew 28:19-20)



¹ In this context, we speak of word and sacrament theologically, not vocationally. In other words, we are not speaking of ministry being done exclusively by those called to the ministry of word and sacrament: pastors. Rather, we refer to a holistic view of ministry centered on the Word of God and the sacraments both as life-giving.

Effective Youth and Family Ministry is: Rooted

Statement: The Lutheran Biblical understanding of God's love and grace is one that young people and families desperately need to hear.

Biblical Basis: *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. This is not your own doing but is a gift from God."*
- Ephesians 2:8

Rationale: There was a time when people lived in a much more "rooted" environment.



- Extended families tended to live in fairly close proximity to each other, allowing for relationships to develop between uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews, and grandparents.
- The length of time people would work not only on a single profession, but quite often for a single employer, was significantly longer than it is today. It was not uncommon for people to spend 20 to 30 years, or perhaps even an entire career, with loyalty to a company or a supervisor.
- The length of time people would live in a single home was much longer than it is today. The concept of "starter," "middle," "dream," and "retirement" homes is a relatively new phenomenon in our social structure.
- The speed of change in our culture has continued to increase. New technologies and the availability of communication in ways we couldn't even dream of just 20 years ago have completely changed the way we live. And the world we live in is socially and theologically pluralistic. Absolutes are rare and values of individualism are celebrated culturally over values of community.

So how do people of faith live in this type of a world? How do we relate to a narrative that we consider to be unchanging and enduring across time?

Effective youth and family ministry is rooted. We are rooted to avoid our theology and our doctrine from being blown about by the winds of change. That is not to say that we don't continue to ask questions, to examine doctrine, and to grow. However, we must be rooted.

We are rooted in the Word of God in written form which is the norm of our faith. All that we do in youth and family ministry must tell the story of the God of love. We are rooted in the Word of God incarnate, which centers our faith on the love and grace of God as the initiating factor of our relationship with the Holy. All that we do in youth and family ministry points towards Jesus Christ.

We are rooted in Word and Sacrament, receiving the gifts and the promises which God gives freely to all of God's people. And we are rooted (but not bound by) our Lutheran traditions, which have historically framed our life together.

Finally, we are rooted in the Great Commission, which calls us to reach beyond ourselves to people in need to serve as witness to God's love, and which calls us to look beyond our traditions to reach to those we have never reached to before, sharing God's love and including all in the inheritance and blessing that is the grace of God.



To be rooted is to always ask ourselves the question: "Is what we're doing focused on forming faith in the God who creates, redeems and sustains his people?" A ministry that is mature can look at what it does and boldly answer "yes!" to this question.

Effective Youth and Family Ministry is: Excellence

Statement: Young people deserve nothing but the best from the church. Freed by grace, we strive for excellence as our standard.

Biblical Basis: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”
- Phillipians 4:8

Rationale: Excellence should be central to what we do. As with all God’s children, our young people should receive the very best of the faithfulness of the church (Body of Christ) to its Lord Jesus. The church in all of its expressions, has a tremendous opportunity to share the love of God with young people. And God calls us to do this in ways that express the God-story in dynamic, expressive and vital ways.



Too often the church has been willing to settle for something less than excellent. Our ministry with young people is sometimes underfunded, understaffed and underresourced. To be completely honest, we have sometimes set lower expectations for ourselves than our young people deserve.

God’s Word from Deuteronomy is a call to the church. The call is to love God, do ministry with young people with all our **heart, soul, and strength**. God’s call here is as **unconditional** as it is **simple**: God’s call is to **excellence**.

The word “excellence” carries much baggage with it. Certainly the standards the rest of the world may apply to excellence do not apply to the practice of the church. But we feel it is important that the youth and family community reclaim this word as its own. This word speaks not to our theology, much of which is about our brokenness, the theology of the cross, and the work of God. Rather it is about our practice; it is about how we approach our ministry with young people. Another word that might be used is faithfulness. Yet it is possible for us to be faithful and still do a poor job in ministry. The excellence we speak of is both faithful and fulfills high standards. *We claim the word excellence as our own:*

- God’s call to the church is to recognize youth ministry as a vocation and in many instances, a profession, and to set high expectations and standards accordingly.
- God’s call to adult leaders working in this ministry is to recognize that youth ministry is a calling to be in relationship with young people and their families. These adults must make themselves available, approachable and ultimately accountable to the churches they serve. They must meet expectations and standards.

To think of youth ministry through a lens of excellence is to break the old stereotypes of youth ministry. As called professionals, certification and standards should be nonnegotiable. Those who take their role seriously seek an understanding of the Lutheran church and its doctrines. As called professionals and volunteers we should seek continuing education, taking advantage of workshops, clinics, and the knowledge of those who have wisdom and experience. As congregations calling youth ministers we must set our standards high. Our young people deserve the faithfulness of the church and its adult leaders.

God gives us an opportunity to live out the call to excellence. The opportunity the church has is to find ways to respond to that call and to be God’s love and grace incarnate in the lives of young people.

Effective Youth and Family Ministry is: Welcoming

Statement: God's message of grace is for all. The work of the church is to welcome all, without exception, into communities of grace.

Biblical Basis: *"Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me." Mark 9:37*

"When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zaccheaus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house. So he came down and welcomed him gladly."

- Luke 19:5-6



Rationale: It is certainly the state of humankind to gravitate to those we know. The stranger is usually seen as suspect rather than seeing the stranger as if they were Christ. We seek out affinity groups and people just like we are and that is most often the rule and not the exception. Youth ministry by its very nature is one of these affinity groups.

Jesus demonstrated hospitality to us in many encounters where he welcomed the unimaginable in very concrete, imaginable ways. Jesus lived it. He invites and welcomes us into a relationship with him that frees us to live like welcoming people.

The welcoming that Jesus teaches goes way beyond just greeting someone at the door. It is welcoming a guest or stranger **and** tending to their needs. It is welcoming someone **and** continuing to take responsibility for them. It is welcoming even those different than yourself **and** going out of your way to accompany them and to hear their story. This is what Jesus modeled.

It has been said that youth ministry in the congregational context is often a direct reflection of those who lead it. If the adults who work with the youth in the church setting have a spirit of hospitality, it is highly likely that young people will develop welcoming traits and share that same value with others. If every youth ministry in the congregational context had "Be welcoming as Christ has been welcoming to us" as one of their primary ministry goals and found a way to sincerely live it out, it could transform the community, the entire congregation, and certainly the ministry to its youth.

When a Jesus-patterned, genuine sense of hospitality is a faith community norm, this is what it could look like:

- Where you live and what you drive is immaterial and Jesus' love for all becomes real.
- Age is not an issue, so we love equally because Christ first loved us.
- Hair and skin color do not matter, for we are in Christ and we are new creations.
- Whether you shop at a boutique or thrift shop is not an issue because you understand in a deep way that absolutely nothing can separate you from the love of God.
- Sexual orientation is not what defines a person; it is your baptismal call that defines you.
- Your family name gives neither credit or discredit to who you are, for Christ calls you "mine."
- The honor roll or the GPA you claim is inconsequential, for God's gift of grace is freely given.
- Forgiveness and reconciliation is standard, not an exception and we understand how the Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words to express.
 - A door of welcome opens in all sorts of ways...we welcome, we are the welcomed, we seek, we are found, we transform, we are transformed, we see Jesus, we show Jesus, and we toss the "Closed" sign in the recycling bin.



What can be more welcoming than God's grace? God's grace lived out! Having that very grace at work in us, through us, among us so that we treat and see each other as if they were Christ, now *that* is welcoming!

Effective Youth and Family Ministry is: Cross Generational

Statement: Faith is formed by the power of Holy Spirit in caring relationships between the generations.

Biblical Basis: *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”* - Hebrews 12:1



Rationale: In a frozen land, the Inuit built rugged statues called inukshuk that aided them in hunting practices. Inukshuk means “One that looks like a person.” These rough sculptures made from stones have now become landmarks, or cairns, for those on a journey in the wild. In other words, the inukshuk is a symbol of someone who has gone before, marked the way, and offers us a certainty that we are on the right path.

Cross-generational ministry in the church is an inukshuk for young people. As written in Hebrews, we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. Those who have gone before us offer us a marker and a certainty that we are on the right path. They affirm the questions we are asking, the doubts that we experience and the joys we live in are all part of a journey that others have taken before and that we take together.

Cross-generational ministry raises up the gifts of each generation as “inukshuk” for others along the way. We are all on this journey together. We all have something to share. We all have something to learn. We all need those who have gone before to cheer us on, to mark the way, and to offer us a message of hope in Christ.

Dr. Rodger Nishioka, who teaches at Columbia Theological Seminary, writes on the resilience factors of a young person. Specifically, this principle implies that all youth need at least five adults in their life who, if they were to do the unspeakable, they could confess to and know that they are still loved by that individual. This is to say that young people need relationships with adults who will listen, teach, nurture, and love youth in safe, yet challenging ways so that they may truly explore and mature in their faith.

Cross generational ministry is incarnational ministry that provides living and loving adults in a young person’s life so that they experience the love of God in very basic, yet profound ways. Cross generational ministry uplifts the cloud of witnesses and cheers us on in the race or journey we embark upon that is faith. Cross generational ministry serves as the inukshuk for us...the wisdom that has gone before us and encourages us to carry on.

Effective Youth and Family Ministry is: Advocacy

Statement: Youth and family ministry speaks on behalf of young people and families within the church, the community, and the world to encourage people to claim their role in the priesthood of all believers.

Biblical Basis: *"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me.' "*
- Matthew 25:40



Rationale: There is a prophetic element to ministry. God calls Christians to stand with and to speak on behalf of those who are hungry, poor, or whose voice is not heard in the broader world. The prophetic element of youth and family ministry is to stand with and on behalf of young people who are often objectified by the world, and whose voices are often not heard within the church by those in authority.

This happens in two ways:

1. We help young people to discover their own voice. Each young person in every one of our congregations, and in the world, is gifted in ministry. Adults who work with youth draw alongside them and help them discover that they are completely capable of doing ministry, of caring for others, and of claiming and assuming their place as full partners in the priesthood of all believers. This happens through teaching, mentoring, and listening.

The young people who intersect with youth and family ministry are, in fact, practical theologians. They are living and trying to make sense of the world in which they live during a time of great personal, social, physical, emotional, and spiritual transition. As they develop, they learn what makes sense to them in terms of the role God plays in the world, and in their lives. Adults engage in the ministry of 'placesharing' with them, and experience the joys and difficulties of adolescence with them. As they do, they help name and develop young people's gifts, they challenge and develop leadership, and they encourage young people to claim the place to which God has called them.

2. Adults stand for those who cannot stand for themselves. There are times when the structures of our culture, and sometimes our church, do not allow young people to speak on their own, or do not hear their voices. At these times, adults who minister alongside them must raise their own voices to speak on their behalf. We advocate for young people and for their ministry. Adults who work with and care about young people do this carefully, so as not to replace their voice, but to supplement it so that in the future, the voice of young people may be heard.

Our understanding of church is simply that it is the people of God. This definition is without condition. All are welcome to participate (see definition of Hospitable). Effective youth and family ministry then, ensures that the young are fully embraced and empowered within this community, that their gifts are recognized, celebrated, developed and are utilized in carrying out the mission of the church.

Effective Youth and Family Ministry is: Congregational



Statement: Effective youth and family ministry happens at a congregational level. All churchwide and synodical structures exist to strengthen the ministry of the congregational community.

Biblical Basis: *“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” - Acts 2:46-47*

Rationale: “You wanna go where everybody knows your name!”...a familiar line from the theme song of a very popular sitcom, “Cheers”. Isn’t that what we are

all about? Don’t we all want to go where someone knows our name? We are called and named by God at our baptism, and our fellow family members within the body of Christ accept us with open arms.

“We welcome you into the body of Christ and into the mission we share: join us in giving thanks and praise to God and bearing God’s creative and redeeming word to all the world.”¹

It is through the life-giving relationships of our fellow family members that we grow and are shaped in our faith. It is community that reminds us of how much we need God, that encourages us, and that literally has faith for us when we are unable to speak for ourselves. Kathleen Norris writes in her book *Amazing Grace*, *“When formal worship seems less than worshipful – and it often does... – I have only to look around at the other people in the pews to remind myself that we are engaged in something important, something that transcends our feeble attempts at worship, let alone my crankiness.”*

It is in community that the first believers gathered in homes and broke bread and prayed, remained in solidarity with the poor, and grew in number and in faith.

Today we continue to meet to break bread. We do this in our congregations and we do this in our homes. In both settings, our young people and their families practice their faith.

It is in these local and daily (or at least weekly) relationships where we slowly shape our faith and understanding of God at work in the world. Congregation is not a building that we go to, but a community in which we connect with one another and experience the most simple yet profound impact on how we daily live out our calling as baptized children of God.

It is the work of youth and family ministry to support young people and families as they practice their faith at home and in their community of worship. We walk along side them, and work to give tools to parents to assist their family in becoming a place where faith is lived out.

The work of synods and churchwide offices, then, is to support the efforts of congregations to create spaces and environments for people to experience the assurance of what we hope for...a place where someone knows our name and calls us to live fully immersed in the grace of God each day.

Effective Youth and Family Ministry is: Connected

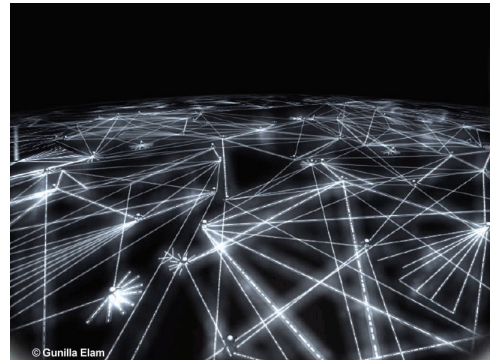
Statement: Transformational ministry with young people connects their faith with the culture in which we live, and the world around us. Youth ministry leaders walk alongside young people as they use their faith to navigate the culture and serve in the world.

Biblical Basis: "He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.'"
- Mark 16:15

Rationale: To be connected is to be in authentic relationship. To be connected is to walk in compassion and seek justice at every turn. To be connected is to recognize that those around us are also children of God; sometimes forgotten, cast aside and looked down upon. Ministry with young people must explore what it means to be connected, to be a part of the Body of Christ, in a real and inclusive way. The youth ministry leader is responsible for uncovering opportunities present in communities that help young people understand and engage their gifts to serve. It is not enough to build up "your group," or even relationships within "your group." Effective youth and family ministry looks to build connections with the world around them, that young people can witness to the hope-filled message of Jesus Christ.

Faith in Christ Jesus empowers believers to have the power to change lives. This power frees God's people to effect positive change today, here on earth. Ministry with young people must explore this power in order to help them create a holistic life of faith. Frederick Buechner writes that "*The place God calls you to is the place where your deep passions and the world's deep hunger meet.*"¹ The faithful must understand their relationships, and their connectedness to others.

Simply put, all Christians live with the choice: we can allow ourselves to be effected by the culture in which we live, or we can choose to affect the culture in which we live. In reality, life is more complicated than this. These two extremes tend to overlap, and all God's people live somewhere in the gray area in between. However, in the midst of this tension, God calls us to connect with each other, and with the world, and to allow our lives to witness to the living Christ. God calls us **not** to turn our backs on the culture,² but to work within it, bringing the kingdom of God to wherever we go.



Romans 12:2 reminds us that we are not to conform but to be transformed so that we prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. We are first called to **go** into the world, to be with in relationship with people. Then we must **tell** the story of God in the world. This story-telling may be verbal, but in an incarnational ministry alongside young people, it can also be understood as action. This honors the context of young people and challenges all believers to re-imagine how one's actions have the power to preach the Good News in ways that transform the world today to be Kingdom of God here on earth as it is in heaven.

In this way, being connected forces people to understand their role as being both with God, and with culture, rather than being apart. This is the model presented by Jesus in scripture. As youth ministry leaders, we practice being fully with our young people in order to help them understand their role to be fully engaged with the world and its culture.

Effective youth and family ministry is a web of connection that excludes no one, and which engages fully with the world in which God has called us to walk, as a witness to grace and love, manifest in Jesus Christ, who first connected with us.



¹ *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC*; Fredrick Buechner; 1993.

² *Christ and Culture*; H. Richard Niebuhr; 1951.

Effective Youth and Family Ministry is: Partnership

Statement: Effective youth and family ministry recognizes, lifts up, and utilizes the gifts of the whole church.

Biblical Basis: *“From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”*
- Ephesians 4:16



Rationale: Let's face it. It's just easier to do things by ourselves. In our own contexts, we know that developing leaders and building leadership teams take time and effort, especially when they have views and opinions that don't agree with our own.

However, we understand that God has not called us to be in isolation but in relationship with others. As we work in partnership with others, we grow as children of God. God has gifted each of us with different gifts and callings. We are called into partnership with others so that we may be blessed by the gifts of our neighbor and we may, in turn, be a blessing to them. If we work in isolation or exclude some from the opportunity to utilize their gifts, we limit what God has intended for our lives.

There are powerful places that partnerships can be manifest throughout the body of Christ: Congregations and parents partner together to fulfill the baptismal promises. The churchwide organization partners with synods and congregations to fulfill the youth gathering. Congregations partner together to share resources, support and common ministries. Ecumenical partners come together to strengthen relationships and to find common ground on which to serve. Congregations, schools, community organizations and businesses partner together to create a community that values young people. Health care organizations partner with churches to create wellness programs that look at the whole person. Congregations and outdoor ministries partner to create significant and dynamic formation events. Colleges and campus ministries partner with congregations in linking young people to a ministry after they graduate. The list goes on and on...

As often as not, it is the congregation, looking through a lens of mission, that can and should initiate these relationships. The congregation can be the neutral turf and central gathering places where all of these other entities can draw together. We are not so myopic as to assume that God only works through the congregation. We know that God works in many and various ways, and it is the task of the people of God to name that for themselves and the world, and then to nurture these connections and relationships. Frankly, it is not enough to merely participate in these conversations. The church can and should be at the forefront of these partnerships, calling together community partners for the sake of young people.

Partnership is nurturing and building up positive relationships as people think and cooperate together for a common purpose. It requires mutual understanding, sharing of challenges, and being in agreement, including agreeing to disagree. It requires openness to one another's weaknesses and strengths. It makes us reach beyond ourselves to new possibilities, ideas, and ways of doing things.

Partnership moves us into a collaborative understanding of what youth ministry is in its continual evolution in our changing world. Partnership exponentially raises the level of possibility for how ministry can happen, and how effective it can be.

Notes: