Laypeople — 'Set Apart to Serve' needs you

The Adult in the Room

Marley is Kevin McCallister's elderly neighbor in the movie "Home Alone." Kevin's brother convinces him that Marley is the "South Bend Shovel Slayer." Of course, that story is not true. It turns out that Marley is a kind elderly man who salts the neighbors' snowy sidewalks and grieves his estrangement from his son and his family.

Kevin remains afraid of Marley until one night in church. Marley is there to listen to his granddaughter's Christmas choir rehearsal. Marley does something simple: He asks Kevin if he can sit next to him and starts a conversation. They share their stories and become friends that night.

Recent *Set Apart to Serve* (*SAS*) research found that a significant number of laypeople reported that they question whether it is appropriate for them to talk with minors. Some responded, "Not only do we not talk to youth about considering church work; we don't talk to the youth at all."

Some laypeople wonder if they have anything in common with the "younger generation." At the same time, some youth report that they value the adults in their congregation. Other youth think older members hardly notice them. There seems to be a disconnect — and an opportunity.

Be like Marley. Start with a simple conversation. Look for natural opportunities to get to know the young people at your church: donut time during fellowship hour, choir rehearsals, gatherings in the narthex before the church service. A simple question can get the conversation started:

- I see you enjoy donuts too. What's your favorite kind?
- Do you play sports or a musical instrument? How's it going?
- So, what grade are you in now? What do you enjoy studying most?

- Did you do anything fun this summer? What did you enjoy most?
- What do you do for fun? What hobbies do you enjoy?
- Reading any good books lately? Tell me about it.
- Do you have a part-time job? How do you like working there?
- The list is endless!

Give them time to tell their story. If it's their first time talking to you, they may feel a bit awkward or nervous at first. Listen with genuine interest.

Sharing your own story can help ease some of this awkwardness or nervousness. Tell them how you would have answered these questions when you were young. Share your life's adventures and interests with them. Youth love to hear adults tell stories — about their sports days, their hunting and camping trips, what school was like "back then," and more. Have fun talking with the youth and watching the friendship grow.

Be Authentic

As the LCMS continues to build a culture of church work formation and recruitment, *Set Apart to Serve* would love to see intergenerational conversations and relationships eventually lead to encouraging our youth to consider full-time church work.

However, even if a relationship never leads to a conversation about church work, building authentic intergenerational friendships is a good thing and builds up the Body of Christ. Caring for one another at every age is wholesome and a significant part of the sanctified life of the church.

At the same time, encouraging a young person to consider a sacred and joyful full-time church work vocation is also a good thing and builds up the Body of Christ. When the conversation warrants, consider these questions:

- I see you in church every Sunday. What do you like about coming to church?
- It's great having you in choir. Are you thinking of making music a career? Have you considered being a director of parish music?
- I've noticed you have leadership qualities in the youth group — have you considered full-time church work? I think you'd make a great director of Christian education (DCE).

- You are so good with children, especially teaching Sunday school and VBS. I'm going to pray that you consider being a Lutheran school teacher.
- It's obvious you love the Word of God — you're in church every Sunday and you ask great questions in Bible class. I think you should pray about being a pastor.
- You have such a gentle, merciful way about you. You are so caring and polite with the elderly and the disabled. I think you should consider being a deaconess.

Laypeople Are Vital

Laypeople have an important role in helping the LCMS prepare pastors and commissioned church workers for generations to come. Pray for more church workers. Build relationships with the youth in your congregation. Encourage young people whose gifts may fit full-time church work when the opportunity arises. Support church-work students, Concordia University System programs and our seminaries.

Check Out These Resources:

- Engaging Laity in Your Congregation
- Conversation Guide for Ages 12–14
- Conversation Guide for Ages 14–18+
- The 8 LCMS Church Work Vocations

'Set Apart to Serve'

- Visit the *Set Apart to Serve* website to learn more about the initiative.
- View and download *SAS* resources to use in encouraging church work vocations.
- For more information, email us at setapart2serve@lcms.org or call 888-843-5267.