

Connecting Churches, Reaching Youth

What If We Stopped Competing for Kids?

What if the answer is found in building stronger partnerships? Across the Mission Rivers District, churches share a common desire: to help children and youth experience the love of Christ. Yet many congregations face similar challenges – limited volunteers, limited resources, and only a handful of young people. Rather than asking, “How can my church attract more youth?”, perhaps a better question is, “How can our churches reach more youth together?”

Two years ago, five rural United Methodist Churches in Mathews County began asking this very question. We gathered around a table and started a conversation. We shared our hopes for our churches and our community. We identified needs, discussed challenges, dreamed about possibilities, and prayed. That conversation became LIFT Mathews (Living In Faith Together).

Today, LIFT Mathews is a collaborative children and youth ministry that makes the impossible seem possible again. Together, we have restarted a community Vacation Bible School, supported local schools, partnered in community-wide events, and strengthened relationships among churches that once worked on their own.

What we discovered is that collaboration is about multiplying our capacity for ministry. Each church remains unique, yet together we can accomplish things that would be difficult for any single congregation to do alone.

The Mission Rivers District has already created opportunities for this kind of collaboration through our geographic clusters. These clusters provide natural starting points for churches to connect, identify community needs, share ideas, and imagine new possibilities for ministry together.

What might collaboration look like in your community? Perhaps it is a shared youth group, a youth retreat, Vacation Bible School, a community outreach event, or a fresh expression designed specifically for young people and families.

To encourage these partnerships, funding is available through the Mission Rivers District for youth ministry collaborations. Grants are intended to help churches build relationships, share resources, and create meaningful experiences that help young people encounter the love of Christ.

Perhaps now is the time to gather around a table with neighboring churches, share hopes for your community, pray together, and ask:

“What is God calling us to do that we could not do alone?”

The answer may become the next ministry that helps children, youth, and families feel welcomed, valued, and loved. That is a mission worth sharing in partnership.

To learn more about LIFT Mathews, contact Rev. Kristie Askew at kristieaskew@vaumc.org.