

Youth Ministry Support in the Episcopal Church in Delaware

By the Rev. Dr. Ketlen Solak

Planning well for any endeavor is essential for success and so is being flexible when having to adapt to the various and sudden new conditions that often come our way. From time to time the diverse plans that we make necessarily change; however, the critical principles that are at the core of good government, business, and faith-based programs are the elements that help such programs stay the course or change direction during unsteady times.

In the same way, ministry for and with youth requires careful planning and utmost flexibility in order to get off the ground and succeed. But, a number of key principles must be at the core of all youth ministry programs for them to succeed and thrive during the best or the worst of times. The presence or absence of these principles will either make or break a program, even if such an offering is diligently planned.

The first and foremost element that must be at the core of youth ministry is **relationship!** More specifically, trusting relationships between adults and youth must be either an already established reality or something that can be nurtured in order for youth ministry to ensue.

One of our youth ministry support coordinators in the Episcopal Church of Delaware, Ed Chamberlain, highlights how and easily recognized, caring rapport is an absolute must when it comes to youth ministry. Ed offers these words of wisdom: "My experience is that one of the most important things in Youth Ministry is relationships. The kids have to know that you care about them and that the church cares about them. You can plan all of the activities in the world, but if the kids don't know that you care about them, the program will fail."

I find this to be true in my own experience in and out of the church, and I imagine that you may have noticed this to be true also. Adults must be caring enough to be open, and genuine. They must be willing to share of one's self, life experience, and faith journey appropriately, and they must be genuinely interested in the lives of young people. Lynne Jensen who also serves as one of our coordinators and who has decades of experience in youth ministry affirms: "I have found that youth ministry starts with relationship and authenticity – with youth, their leaders, and Christ within a community of faith."

An authentic and open relationship between adults and youth also involves the ability to invite youth in and to listen to them – helping them know that they belong and are valued members of the congregation. "Youth ministry for me is about making the love of God real to our young people. As we notice them, invite them in, welcome their questions and show that we are there for them, they will believe us when we say

that God is love," says Martha Weiss, educator par excellence and member of our trio of coordinators.

It is often said that youth ministry begins at home. The influence of loving, faith-filled parents, grandparents, and/or other close family members is often underestimated. I can testify to this truth from my own upbringing. I often give credit to my parents for their indelible influence on my life in terms of their personal example as well as their consistent efforts to mentor me in matters of faith. Ministry to and with youth is a mentoring endeavor that can be greatly augmented in manifold ways by members of the church. Youth ministry is possible and has the potential to flourish when faithful adults are genuinely interested and willing to give of their time and talents to share their experiences with the younger, fellow pilgrims in our midst.

In Christ,
Ketlen Solak+
Bishop's Youth Missioner