

# Youth Advisors Say Yes: How to Enlist, Train, Support

## The Problem

Securing youth advisors is one of the most challenging and frustrating tasks in the congregation. The reluctance of volunteers to say yes may be a symptom of other problems. Do any of these problems sound familiar?

### *The Congregation's Priority for Youth Ministries*

- Lack of support and appreciation from staff, parents, team members, and youth
- Low priority for youth ministry in the congregation (e.g., low budget item, little advocacy by the diocese)
- Inferior or no facilities for recreation; little or no equipment; no transportation vehicle

### *Youth Behavior and Needs*

- Invisibility of youth ministries to the congregation (e.g., few or no youth leaders in worship)
- Lack of awareness or misunderstandings concerning developmental stages of young people and expectations of their behavior
- Lack of understanding of the need for flexibility and the space to fail; uncomfortable relating with and talking to young people

### *Advisor/Leader Needs*

- Inadequate training
- Lack of program ideas or resources
- Abuse of the youth advisor team concept (e.g., one person assumes role of "boss" or team members are not dependable)
- Inability to communicate with or get to know young people
- Lack of clarity about what the person is being recruited to do or for how long

### *Miscellaneous*

- Poor publicity (e.g., for youth programs, retreats, trips)
- Lack of variety in programming (same format every meeting)

## **The Solution:** Youth Ministry Leadership Strategy in Three Steps, Enlistment, Training, Support

Form an Enlistment/Training/Support Team composed of young people, youth advisors, session members, members at large, staff persons, parents, and the Christian Education Committee (this committee could be a subgroup of the CE Committee).

### *Step One: Enlistment*

Survey the congregation concerning time, talents, and interests to determine:

- Specific interests or skills (e.g., singing, playing a musical instrument, drama, leading discussions, sports, food, dancing, group building, hiking, transportation, counseling)
- Willingness to serve as a member of the youth ministry team / Willingness to participate in one-time events (e.g., retreats, conferences, trips)

Establish relationships. Be intentional about getting to know persons who returned cards, young adults, and other likely candidates. Speak to them following worship service, during coffee hour, and at other social times.

Schedule a weekday Bible study or luncheon study group for adults. Focus on one community-building exercise at each meeting. If they become a close group, they will be more likely to accept an invitation to work as team members in youth ministries.

Extend the invitation. The persons who extend the invitation need to have a relationship with the prospect. Include young persons on the enlisting team. Visit the prospect at home if time permits; if not, use the phone. Check to see if the call is at a convenient time. Have a packet of materials about the group, past and present programs, leaders, or other information to help the prospective advisor get to know the group.

### *Guidelines for the Invitation*

- Be friendly and warm.
- Thank the person for responding to the time, talent, and interest survey or explain how the person was recommended.
- Invite the person to become a member of a team of adults involved in youth ministries. Be specific about what you're asking him or her to do.
- Talk about the gifts and skills of the other team members.
- Indicate the length of time the person will be expected to serve.
- Give the person the schedule for the first training (enrichment) event, explaining that the focus will be "community building."
- Give the person opportunities to express feelings, concerns, and hopes and to ask questions.
- Ask for names of persons with whom the person would like to serve.
- It is important that the volunteer perceive the service to be:
  - A team effort
  - An opportunity for personal enrichment
  - Significant for the young people
  - If the prospect wishes to think about it, set a date for the response. Ask the prospect to pray for Christ's calling in ministries and service.
  - If the invitation is accepted, send a letter confirming the agreement.

### *Step Two: Training*

- Identify persons from enlistment team to be responsible for planning the training events. Invite outside specialists if budget permits.
- The first training event needs to focus on team building for the advisors (approximate time: 2—3 hours).
- Provide a booklet for each person containing the following information:
  - Names, addresses, and phone numbers of the young people
  - Names, addresses, and phone numbers of the planners
  - A statement of purpose or goals for youth ministries (you will need to write one if you don't have it)
  - Responsibilities of youth advisors
  - Resources available for young people
  - Program ideas

- Who the young people are
- Ask youth advisors to indicate areas where they need training. Plan an event, based on these needs, early in the Fall.

### *Step Three: Support*

#### Recognition

1. Form a planning committee. The committee should be composed of equal numbers of young people and adult advisors (6 to 12 is a good size) and a staff person. If there are two or more youth groups, the committee may want to split for planning. Use the nominating committee model of persons chosen for extra responsibility and service rather than the student council model of popularity and elections. Ask for volunteers interested in serving, confirmed by the rest of the group.
2. All leaders and teachers in the educational ministry of the congregation need to be recognized publicly during worship. This is an opportunity for the congregation to say "We're with you in your efforts; we thank you." A coffee hour or reception can follow the worship service to give members an opportunity to appreciate and encourage the volunteers.
3. A brief personality sketch of each youth advisor can be put in the congregation's newsletter. Indicate occupation, interests, and a response to the question, "What do you enjoy most about being a youth advisor?"
4. Create a youth bulletin board with pictures of youth advisors and members of the planning committee.
5. Cards or small gifts of appreciation can be given to advisors at Christmas or Valentine's Day or on birthdays. Plan a social event, cookout, picnic, for advisors and committee.

#### *Tasks of Planning Committee*

1. Meet monthly or quarterly to plan and implement activities and studies for a period of one to three months.
2. Publicize programs and plans through a monthly or a quarterly newsletter, bulletin boards, as well as announcements in Christian education and pulpit.
3. Attend meetings regularly.
4. The role of the staff person, Christian education coordinator, youth coordinator, or clergyperson on the enlistment/training/support team and planning committee is that of consultant, resource person, enabler, and (occasionally) leader and as a contact person with the diocesan youth coordinator and committee and so on.