

Guide for Inviting and Selecting Adults to Serve as Leaders

This was written specifically for Youth Gatherings, but has application for other events.

There is no perfect adult leader, nor is perfection expected. But the time and effort you and your congregation invest in intentionally inviting, selecting and equipping adults for their role will ultimately bless your Gathering leaders, the youth attending the Youth Gathering and ultimately the entire youth ministry in your congregation.

Be Intentional:

Here are some tips and guidelines for inviting and selecting leaders that will make the Youth Gatherings a positive faith-growing experience for your youth and adults.

- Pray for God's guidance in identifying adult role models for this event.
- Don't just advertise for interested adults or volunteers, Instead seek-out adults who can lead and walk along-side youth. There are likely a few names that come to mind immediately, but others may not be so obvious. Observe adults interacting with youth to see who has the ability, experience, and/or potential to relate well with youth. Ask youth whom they observe as caring adults.
- If you have adults volunteer without being asked, tell them you appreciate their offer and will add their name to the list of adults you are considering.
- Some congregations compile a list of those who volunteer and those who are "nominated" by youth and other adults. They then form a committee (youth who will be attending the Youth Gathering, youth minister/worker and possibly a staff person, someone from council or other trusted adults) to choose which adults will attend.
- Some congregations have an application process, and determine adult leaders based on gifts needed to fill a team.
- As a general rule, Adult Leaders need to be at least 21 years old at the time of the event. Check with your own congregation's insurance company for guidelines and policy for age of drivers and those in positions of responsibility.

Ratio of Adults to Youth:

It's all about calling one another by name and building personal, trusted relationships that nurture faith.

- Our guideline for Senior High Gatherings is one adult leader for every five youth of the same gender. For the Middle School Gathering, one adult for every four youth of the same gender. (If you have one male and three female youth you need one male adult and one female adult. In this case, the male group will be housed with another group so there is not a one youth/one adult ratio in a room.)

- Occasionally, congregations find that the number of adults who want to attend a Youth Gathering is equal to or higher than the number of youth! If this should happen, discern the impact adults will have on an event. Are there youth with special needs or issues needing one-on-one attention? Will the group benefit from a mentoring approach? For a youth focused gathering, the number of adults should generally not be greater than the number of youth attending.
- Some congregations have just the opposite situation - they cannot find enough adults to serve. Be intentional about the personal invitation, based on the gifts you see and desire. Provide as much information and support as possible to those you invite. Think about joining up with another congregation in your area.

Qualities to Look For:

Whether you are hosting a bowling party, engaged in a Bible study, or building relationships among your youth and adults, youth ministry events are complex experiences. Not every adult is capable of the pace and expectations for working with directly with youth, especially a Youth Gathering.

- From a risk management point of view, potential hazards are numerous: there can be injury to an underage person, transportation can break down in the middle of nowhere, or covenants for living in community are broken.
- From a program point of view, there are tremendous opportunities and responsibilities to view a Youth Gathering and all preparation as potential for nurturing faith: fundraisers, Bible studies preparing for the event, car or bus time traveling to an event, small group discussions during the event to help youth process their experience and sharing the story when back home in the congregation and the home and school where they daily interact.
- From a practical point of view, Youth Gatherings can be physically exhausting and exhilarating: Late nights, early mornings, sleeping on the floor or in cars/buses while traveling, working in the heat at a Service project, plus emotionally and spiritually exhausting and rewarding conversations with youth.

Look for these characteristics:

- A committed faith centered in Christ
- Focuses on youth and their gifts and needs
- Possesses good common sense
- Makes good decisions under pressure
- Triple AAA: authentic, available, affirming.
- Can be firm yet positive in setting boundaries and limits
- Cares deeply for youth and is able to relate well with youth
- Strong sense of self - does not relate to youth for personal affirmation
- Sense of humor - especially in trying times
- Mature & responsible
- Flexible and patient
- Committed and reliable

Build a Diverse Team:

Even if your adult leaders are a team of two (the minimum), try to build a team that includes gifts that complement each other. Some qualities you might want to consider as you build your team:

- Male/female ratio per same gender of youth
(One adult/5 Senior youth and one/4 for Middle School/Jr High are recommended.)
- Early risers and night owls
- Extrovert personalities and introverts (Up front, "let's do it" types and quieter, behind the scenes, "Do you want to talk about it?" types)
- "Big Picture" and those detail oriented.
- Varying skills and gifts: Bible study leader, organizational leader, communicator, creative, artistic, medical skills, games leader etc.
- Cross-generational representation. Older adults can be some of the most valued and honored leaders by the youth.

How to Invite Adults to be Leaders:

How you approach and invite potential adults to serve as leaders is a critical step:

- Well in advance of the registration deadline, make an appointment to sit down with the potential adult leader to talk with him/her about the event. Equip youth to take the lead as interviewers, presenters of the cause, etc.
- Explain the event and why the congregation is participating in the Youth Gathering.
- Explain why he/she is being asked to be a leader for this event. Be specific:
 - What qualities do you see them bringing to this experience? Did youth nominate them? What special skills and gifts do you see in them that makes them an asset?
 - We often assume adults know why we are asking them to participate, when in fact they don't. Describing their specific qualities lets them know they are needed, gifted and even "called" to serve in this role.
- Explain the expectations and role for them as an adult leader for this event. Will they need to have a background check? Will they need to drive? Personal liability issues? Cost to them? Do they need to pay for their own participation? Gas?
- Let them know how the congregation and youth ministry will support them.
- Encourage their questions.
- Ask them to take time to prayerfully consider your proposal. Set a date to get back to you.
- Follow up with them by the deadline.

Do Background Checks:

It is strongly recommended that you perform a background check on each adult leader before they are officially selected to serve along side youth, on campus or an overnight.

- Check with your church council and church insurance policy to see if procedures for background checks are recommended and already in place.
- If no policy is in place, form a task force to establish Safe Haven Guidelines, including how to proceed with background checks for adult volunteers who work with youth.

Equip Your Adults

Once you have selected your adult leaders, spend time equipping them for the event:

- Bring the adult team of Caring Adults together for group building, planning, and prayer.
- Train all your adults in effective youth ministry. It is easy - check out these on-line resources <http://www.elcayouthministrynetwork.wildapricot.org/pdproject>
- Successful youth ministry is built on personal, trusted, relationships with adults. Be sure to talk about appropriate ways and places for adults to talk with youth and safe hugs/touch. Spend time creating and discussing Covenants.
- Develop a timeline for all registration deadlines, fundraisers, your group's covenant, Bible studies and communication with parents/guardians.
- Discuss the serious issues and scenarios that might occur and create a plan for handling them.
- Make sure all release and medical forms are completed and adult leaders know whom to contact in case of emergency.
- Commission and bless your caring adults and youth during worship the week before they participate in A Gathering, Camp or other specific events.

Transformational Youth Ministry:

A Youth Gathering or other specific events, whether it is hosted by the your Synod, the Region or the ELCA Youth Gathering . . . it is not the event itself but the process and trusted, caring relationships encountered across generations before, during and after the event that are transformational and form disciples.