

Jim's Tool Box

What's Happening with Youth Ministry?

What is the state of youth ministry in the Capitol Area South District? I wish I had a better picture of how things are among the congregations in the district when it comes to ministry with youth. My hope is that things are well, and that in many places around the district youth ministry continues with vitality and energy led by dedicated volunteer leaders or part-time or full-time paid youth leaders. Some youth groups are led by the pastor of the congregation – sometimes by choice and sometimes by default.

In looking over the 2007 statistics for the district, sixty-three congregations did not report any members under the category “UMYF Members.” That means that almost half of the congregations in the district (127 congregations in all) did not report any members in a youth ministry that could be connected with United Methodist Youth Fellowship. Of course that *could* mean that there are youth in the congregation, but there is no youth group. More likely, I suspect it means for several congregations, there are no youth present.

On the other side of the ledger, congregations that report membership in UMYF range in numbers from two youth to one hundred fifty youth. The six largest reported enrollments of youth in UMYF are:

1. Reynoldsburg (150)
2. Pickerington Trinity (120)
3. Hilliard (97)
4. Village Chapel (61)
5. Scioto Ridge (60)
6. Carroll Shalom (60)

I would be interested in hearing about the state of youth ministry in your congregation. I would like to know if there is an active youth ministry in your congregation. I would also like to hear from you if you do not have an active youth ministry or any youth in your church. Please e-mail me at jwaugh@wocumc.org.

Recently, I was reading a blog written by Micki McCorkle on the Youth webpage of the General Board of Discipleship. Micki is the Director of Leadership Development for adults who work with youth and young adults at the General Board of Discipleship. In her blog, she wrote about congregations that bemoan the lack of young people in their churches. McCorkle urged that rather than bemoan the lack of youth, congregations should focus on young people. She wrote,

“To focus on something, someone, or some group, is not to dream abstractly about what they could do if they were here, or to lament their absence. To focus on something or some ones, in this case young people, is to learn about them, pay attention to them,

listen to them understand them, meet them where they are and invite them to create the future with us (instead of thinking they need to build the future we've envisioned).”

She went on to note that when we sit in our churches and bemoan the fact that there are no young people, our focus does expand. McCorkle reminds us that we are focusing on the emptiness and so we get more of the same. She declares, “God calls us to focus on the fullness – the possibility and potential of new relationships and opportunities that new ideas could bring our way.

God bless those paid and volunteer servant ministers who are willing to step up and work with youth in their church and community... A congregation needs to declare that “young people matter to God, and we need to minister to and with youth” for youth ministry to happen in the life of that congregation.

It may be “the chicken or the egg” thing, but I believe that most congregations need to have committed leaders and workers who will give themselves to ministry with youth if the congregation is to see fruit from the effort to have youth present in their congregation.

God bless those paid and volunteer servant ministers who are willing to step up and work with youth in their church and community. Whether you are a fulltime youth leader, a paid part-time worker, a pastor of a church who leads a youth group, or a parent or other adult who offers himself or herself for ministry to and with youth, I thank God for you! For those of you do this work, I'm not telling you anything when I say that it is challenging and often frustrating to work with youth in today's culture. I realize it can also be very rewarding when things “click” and when the lives of youth are impacted by youth leaders and ministries to and with youth.

A congregation needs to declare that “young people matter to God, and we need to minister to and with youth” for youth ministry to happen in the life of that congregation. It will take the dedicated effort of two or more adults in a given congregation or group of churches for youth ministry to blossom in most of our churches. To that end, the Capitol Area South District Youth Council sees as its mission the support and encouragement of workers with youth. Whether the workers are paid or unpaid; whether there are five or fifty youth in the youth group, the District Youth Council seeks to encourage the ministry of adults who work with the youth of the congregations and communities of the Capitol Area South District.

To that end, we have recently launched a Youth Leader Resource page on the district website. We hope it will be a place where leaders of youth can find information, resources, ideas, and training opportunities that will bolster

them in their work with youth in their congregations. You will find the page at <http://www.capareasouthumc.org/youth>.

As with any webpage, the biggest challenge is keeping the content fresh and up to date. The members of the Youth Council are committed to helping that happen, but we are also seeking the input from other youth leaders from around the district:

- What has worked for you?
- What resources have you found useful?
- Tell us about an activity or a mission trip that your youth group has shared in lately. Send us some pictures that we can post with the story.

The Youth Council is also looking at offering a training event (take a look at the Youth Leader Resource page for training opportunities). We would be glad for suggestions for topics that would be helpful to youth leaders/workers around the district.

Please send any suggestions for training topics or submissions for the Youth Leader page to jwaugh@wocumc.org.