

Youth work

1 Timothy 4:12 "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity."

Youth, teens, are very important to God. In the Bible are many teenagers, who had a relationship with God, and who did a huge work for Him: Joseph, Samuel, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Daniel, Mary – all called as child or teenager and in the service of God at a young age.

So it's important that we take teens and youth seriously, and invest time in them to help them grow in their relationship with God.

The youth is the church of the future!

As Grace Communion, we have these values for youth service:

- God deeply loves all youths. It is the appropriate response of the church to value and cherish youths.
- By God's design, youths are relational beings. It is the appropriate response of the church to provide a relationally based youth ministry.
- The Holy Spirit is drawing and gifting youths for lifelong, personal relationships of devoted service to Jesus Christ. It is the appropriate response of the church to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in actively evangelizing and discipling youths.
- God is the Creator of families and often draws people to his Son working in and through families. It is the appropriate response of the church to work with youths in partnership with their families wherever possible.

And this mission:

Grounded firmly in these core values we feel led to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in pursuing the following two-part mission for youth ministry:

- Create an environment in which youths are exposed to the gospel and brought into the presence of Jesus Christ.
- Prepare, equip and release the youths for ministry in their congregations, their communities and in the world at large.

Building up of youth work on 4 areas:

Youth work is not only about Bible studies or youth activities. There are four areas where we can make ourselves useful in:

1. **Communion** – Teens and youth belong in the church. They need to feel at home. Accepted, loved, important, appreciated, necessary, taken seriously. How do you stimulate this?
 - a. Hang out with them, invest time in them
 - b. Make sure you learn their name quickly and get to know them as well
 - c. Enter their world; what do they experience, how is their life, what's bothering them, what is going well?
 - d. Do something fun with them regularly
 - e. Give them a hug, a present once in a while, practical help, etc.
 - f. Don't be judgemental, but support them as much as possible in what they do right/in good values etc.
 - g. Don't act like a teenager yourself; stay an adult, but be very involved
 - h. Be reliable, true and honest yourself
 - i. Listen to them
 - j. Make sure that your church service is interesting and appealing to youth, show that the service is also for them and not just for adults (in sermon, music, form, length, interaction etc.)
 - k. Get into a long-term reliable relationship with them
 - l. Show that they are important for who they are, that they belong
 - m. Take them serious in their remarks and ideas
 - n. Treat them as fellow believers, not as outsiders in the faith
 - o. Take them to bigger Christian events, like the EO jongerendag, so that they can experience communion with many youth at the same time.

2. **Worship** – the expression of our love, respect, astonishment, trust in worshipping our amazing God. Youths need to get the opportunity for this. How do we stimulate this:
 - a. Choose songs that express love and worship to God openly
 - b. Music is important to youths; choose music styles that speak to them, make sure that there are music styles in the church service that they can recognise themselves in.
 - c. Talk to them about how great God is; share experiences and insights with each other
 - d. Start activities that show the wonder of creation

- e. Pray with teenagers, let them pray, possibly with soft music on the background
- f. Let teens participate in the music, or even: let them do the entire music by themselves once in a while
- g. Take teens to Christian concerts in Holland, so that they get the opportunity to worship in bigger groups of youth.

3. **God's care towards you** – We receive teaching and a relationship with Jesus by His Word. He lives in us through the Holy Spirit; God takes care of us. Young people need this care. How can we cooperate in this, so that they receive this?

- a. By giving teens education and interaction in small groups.
- b. You can do this regularly during the sermon, or before or after the service (if the sermon is –also- aimed at the youth). After the sermon you can discuss the sermon with each other on a relevant level for the young people, pray for each other and share experiences.
- c. Make it relevant for teens; for their lives and situations.
- d. Focus on Jesus; and on the relationship with Him (What Is Jesus Doing, instead of What Would Jesus Do); Jesus is present in you, asks you to follow Him.
- e. Make sure you pass the heart of the gospel, so that young people can make a choice for Jesus, or, if they've already chosen for Him, get firmly rooted in that choice.
- f. Youths need much more than entertainment.
- g. Show that you have confidence in them to be workers for Jesus themselves; in the church, in evangelizing among friends, in serving etc.
- h. Prevent in your teaching that a separate teen church arises; keep youths involved in the congregation as a whole.

4. **Subservience**– Youths need to be able to work along actively and be servient, because:

- a. Jesus Himself is servient; and He asks us to be like Himself
- b. You experience His nature by being servient; get to know Him better.
- c. You get much more involved with Jesus and the church ("This is my church")
- d. You develop more relationship, devotion and commitment to each other and to God if you contribute.

How do we give this opportunity:

- a. Let youths help in the church, like with the sound, music, sermons, child work, offerings, prayers etc.
- b. Choose possible tasks that fit with their strengths/talents and interests, so that they are supported and feel that they're needed.
- c. Don't make the task too difficult right away, so that the chance for success is big.
- d. Don't pressure them and force anything; it has to be voluntary. Encourage them, show that they're needed.
- e. Preferably give them a regularly returning task.
- f. Prevent youths from thinking that they're only appreciated when they do a lot of work; don't make it into a religion that's based on works; we're a family.

Discipleship from youths

Some youths jump out; it's obvious that they want more. They can be future leaders or active Christians in their church or environment.

It's important to invest a lot of time in these youths:

- in your relationship with them
- in teaching and training
- in their sense of responsibility, accountability

By the next characteristics you can see that a young person can do and wants to do more:

- Availability; does the youngster makes time for it?
- Fruits; is he/she reliable and dedicated, and has good behaviour throughout the week as well?
- Teachable?
- Does the youngster respond to what is offered by the church or other Christian organisations?

Youth work among non-believing youths

Not all young people in the church are believers. And unbelieving friends can come along to youth activities or services.

Some youths are in trouble, for example with alcohol, drugs or sexual relationships.

There are also a lot of youths, whose parents are divorced, or who don't get enough support from their parents. Especially for all these youths, the church can be a great support.

How can we reach these youths?

1. By interacting with them (instead of preaching to them)
2. By entering into their world; doing with them what they're doing
3. By showing during that interaction, that you like being with them, and accepting them
4. By supporting what you find good in their values, behaviour, ideas (instead of criticising their problems)
5. By telling them about Jesus in their language
6. By being authentic, caring, reliable and transparent yourself
7. By showing daily and consistently in who you are, that being a Christian works, and that God's love is true.
8. By accepting them at Christian activities, without them having to make a choice right away, so that they can make multiple Christian contacts and friends.
9. By asking them to follow Jesus.

Questions:

1. Do you know youths in your church? What can you tell about them?
2. Is there youth work in your congregation already? Where could you begin with?
3. Do you find it easy or difficult to make contact with youths? How do you handle this, or how could you improve this?
4. How could youth work along in your congregation?
5. Are sermons ever aimed at youths? How could this be improved?
6. Is the music appealing to youths?

Practical assignment:

1. Get to know one or more youths better in the next weeks.
2. Find out if youths in your congregation can help in doing something.
3. Discuss with your minister if there's a possibility in your congregation to start teaching for youths in small groups.