



Make It Simple

A Resource for Stewardship Education and Annual Response

MAKE IT SIMPLE and Youth Stakeholders in the frenzy!

The world is changing, and fast!

By the time you could have pounded out that first sentence on a keyboard, your world and reality shifted and changed in significant ways. Second by second you're measuring the fluctuations of stock markets around the world. One oil well dries up and four others are drilled. Two more fast food companies launch four more \$1.00 menu items aimed at high school youth. It's a frenzied world out there, and you have a stake in it: You're part of a global economic and climate crisis, neither with a predictable end in sight. But young people are really in the thick of it.

You may also be part of a congregation with another crisis in mind. Ask a hundred congregations what their top concerns are and you are likely to find near the top a common denominator—youth. Where are they, how can we stop losing them, how can we get them back, and how can we affirm and reclaim their gifts as a part of the expansive and diverse body of Christ? Youth are in the thick of the frenzied, worried church.

None of this is news to young people. This is the reality in which they live and are woven into—frantic, complex, and consuming. They are stakeholders in the present and future worlds in which they already find themselves.

QUESTION: How can this information instruct the ways in which you will engage young people in MAKE IT SIMPLE?

MAKE IT SIMPLE and Youth Not without hope or ability

⁴Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, ⁵ “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” ⁶Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” ⁷ But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you, ⁸ Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD.” ⁹ Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, “Now I have put my words in your mouth. ¹⁰ See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.” Jeremiah 1:4-10

To a young and insecure Jeremiah, God gave immeasurable and amazing power and wisdom. Nowhere did God’s call imply that Jeremiah was perfect or the answer to the world’s woes. Instead, what he was given and asked to do was no less amazing and life-changing. The very words of God poured out of young Jeremiah’s mouth and his actions and influence shook the world, even up to this moment.

The world can and will be shaken by young people you know. (That’s right. You may know a teenager whose lifework will change the world!) They are armed with immeasurable hope and gifts alongside their worries and angst, as is the intent of God.

QUESTION: How will this information change your viewpoint about the value of teenagers in helping MAKE IT SIMPLE an effective part of your congregations’ life?

MAKE IT SIMPLE and Youth Power and influence

Do you realize what power and influence young people have in the church and world? Do they—youth—even realize the extent of the power and influence they possess or wield through their resources, generosity, buying power, opinions, abilities, wisdom, and votes? Probably not, but there are people, corporations, and organizations in the world that do. And they strategize carefully how to take advantage of the power and influence of youth.

The lives of young people are under close, continuous observation because they fuel multi-billion dollar markets. Young people are expressing their ideas, hopes, dreams, and frustrations worldwide without wires, postage stamps, or permission givers. Young people have discovered that they really can influence who will be elected president.

Let's just name it:

- Youth in the United States spent around \$125 billion dollars in 2007.
- Youth influence up to 90% of family decisions related to buying and consumption, particularly clothing and groceries.
- Peers and friends are most influential in the lives of youth; significant family members and trusted adults follow closely.
- Youth and young adults are driving the “new economies” of China and India.
- Who's aggressive and savvy about youth—who they are, what they think, how they act, and what and who they influence? Corporations concerned primarily about selling products and services related to:
 - Fast food, snack food, and beverages
 - Personal electronics (cell phones, media players, computers)
 - Clothing and footwear
 - Entertainment (online, video games, music, film, TV)
 - Web sites for social networking and gaming
 - Recreation (skateboarding, biking, snowboarding, surfing)

The not-so-secret formula for success: cross-branding and cross-marketing. Success doesn't come from sending one message about one thing. Success with youth markets is about musicians wearing a particular kind of shoe and T-shirt performing at a concert sponsored by a soft drink company promoting a soon-to-be released video game featuring the same musicians supporting a social cause embraced by the same companies.

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A message designed to be spread far and wide is woven, seen, heard, worn, shared, tattooed, and customized across a young person's daily life and everything he or she comes into contact with.

QUESTION: How can your congregation use this information to bring benefit to young people in your midst?

MAKE IT SIMPLE and Youth Lessons and reminders

You may not know it, but your congregation offers deep value to the lives of young people. You already have a message that brings life. You are led by Christ into a way of living that is different, one built on generosity, justice, peace, hope, compassion, respect, and serving others. Think about it. You really do know that the good news of Christ infiltrates every living human cell, every corner of creation, and every millisecond of time.

This is exactly the place and opportunity where young people thrive and explode with infectious energy. They are both hungry for this for themselves, and at the same time eager to be unleashed as God's blessing to the frenzied world that they know so well. Sometimes your best interaction with youth may be just a matter of pronouncing God's blessing on what they are already doing, by simply saying, "Excellent!"

Remember the words of Jeremiah 1:9-10:

Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

The power and influence given to young people comes from God. You have the opportunity to help young people claim this in everyday life, guided by the Spirit and the heart and mind of Jesus.

QUESTION: If teenagers can be "prophets" like Jeremiah, how might they be helpful in your congregation's stewardship ministry?

MAKE IT SIMPLE and Youth A positive example

You may have heard the opinion that extremely large gatherings of Christian youth are all fun and games, or that the events are too expensive and tie up too much money. But here's one great example of the positive influence and power of youth put to use—unleashed, actually! It happened during two weeks in July 2006, when 39,000 youth and adults from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America came to San Antonio for Cruzando: The ELCA 2006 Youth Gathering.

- The offerings brought in over \$1 million for world hunger and special ministries.
 - Sunday morning offering = \$580,000+
 - “Hamiltons for Hunger” offering = \$530,000+
 - Gift cards given for local ministries in San Antonio, Texas = \$130,000
 - 25+ ministries in the United States and around the world were designated to receive the offerings
- About 16,000 youth were involved in service opportunities in San Antonio. Gathering participants performed tens of thousands of hours of volunteer service.
- 5,000 School Kits and 2,000 Health Kits were assembled for La Frontera Border Ministries, an ecumenical organization that works along the United States/Mexico border.

These are the signs and fruits of young people who are generous and concerned, willing to sacrifice. These are Christ's people who are serving others, rethinking how they use their time and resources, and are taking the gospel seriously in life. (For more details about this event's impact, click on

<http://archive.elca.org/youth/printer/gathering%20flyer06%20lowres.pdf>)

QUESTION: What in these examples might be instructive for your congregation's stewardship approaches to teenagers?

MAKE IT SIMPLE and Youth Five points of engagement

If you're wondering how to engage youth in any venture—or more specifically in MAKE IT SIMPLE—you might consider these five places where you can find youth being their most active and hopeful selves. Come to think of it, these “points of engagement” are not so much places—a Friday night football game—as much as they are some qualities of young people's lives where their gifts, qualities, and needs are openly visible.

When you find yourself in these places—at these “points”—you'll be connected to possibilities for lively, healthy and effective programs, and activities among youth. And by the way, remember that you are as necessary to the lives of young people as they are necessary to yours!

You can recognize these points of engagement by asking yourself questions such as the following:

Point One: Social interaction

Where do youth gather for non-school, non-work times? Which older adults still know how to communicate with youth? How do youth meet people other than teen-agers exactly like themselves? How well do you know what's really important—or unimportant—to youth in your community?

Point Two: Active engagement

Where are the places where young people are physically active? How can you tell when youth are engaged? What challenging visual and hands-on experiences could young people lead? What elements of current culture are primarily the province of youth?

Point Three: The intersection of faith and real life

How might MAKE IT SIMPLE connect faith, theology, and real life moments? How well can you cut through “pretend Christianity” to something deeper and more important? What makes life “real” for youth? How well can adults and youth jointly present Jesus as real?

Point Four: Commitment to life changes and behaviors

How well can you witness to the changes God has made in your life? How might young people receive that witness? Given the course of current events and trends, what changes can youth expect in their lives? What real consideration do young people want from you regarding their adult lives? What do they want to change about themselves?

Point Five: Creativity and self/group expression

Where and how do young people show their imaginations? How affirming are the permission-giving processes in your congregation? Whose ideas hold sway? How do youth activities invite self-expression? Who sets boundaries and how does that happen? How well is forgiveness practiced in your congregation?

To start answering these questions, consider any of the youth-engaging resources here:

- National Geographic's *Human Footprint* program: Visit <http://channel.nationalgeographic.com/channel/human-footprint/> to see what the average person in America consumes in the course of a lifetime.
- Hunger Simulation Meals: To start working together on a hunger awareness experience, visit <http://archive.elca.org/hunger/resources/ideas/meal1.html> or <http://archive.elca.org/hunger/resources/ideas/meal2.html>.
- *Just Neighbors* interactive curriculum: To raise awareness of the root causes of poverty and homelessness and being community-based responses, visit <http://www.justneighbors.net/>.

QUESTION: Which of these engagement points would be a good place for your congregation to begin (or continue) stewardship ministry that involves youth?

MAKE IT SIMPLE and Youth Nothing's too small

To start anything significant, you take a first step. To take a first step toward anything significant, you first look at what you already have—your assets. Whether as part of MAKE IT SIMPLE or other important congregational programs, youth can play a significant role because they possess considerable assets.

Some of those useful gifts, though, seem small at first. So you might need to remind yourself of some simple examples of how seemingly small assets, gifts, opinions, questions, or people ended up as the first steps or foundations for large-scale programs of great and godly good. Think about:

- Mother Teresa, who started her world-changing ministry by giving one Calcutta beggar one blanket.
- The widow in Jesus' sight line, whose pennies-poor gift became an example of sacrificial giving for centuries to follow. (Or, depending on your exegetical tradition, an example of a pathetic person who was duped by the religious system into making a foolish and unsustainable choice.)
- The one young person in your congregation whose insistence on healthy living saves a family from the curse of second-hand smoke.
- The short You-Tube video that catches the attention of millions of viewers, exposing stupidity, fraud, or shallowness.
- All the non-profit organizations and helpful charities that begin with the strength of one person's commitment to "do something."

The size of the asset is not that important. Instead, you may miss those important first steps because you haven't taken the time to ask about your available assets or to map them in an organized way. To do so, check any of the resources here. All are time-tested among youth and adults.

The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act on its Gifts by Luther K. Snow. The most thorough explanation and hands-on guide to asset-based planning. Available from The Alban Institute, <http://www.alban.org/bookdetails.aspx?id=956>.

The Quick and Simple Congregational Asset-Mapping Experience. A key chapter from *The Power of Asset Mapping*, with complete instructions for this task. From The Alban Institute at

http://www.alban.org/uploadedFiles/Alban/Bookstore/pdf/resources/Asset_Mapping/resource2.pdf .

The Great Permission ELCA stewardship resources. One denomination's attempt to translate asset-based thinking into stewardship ministry. See

http://archive.elca.org/stewardship/gp_resources.html .

QUESTION: How could you assay and use the assets of teenagers in your congregation?

MAKE IT SIMPLE and Youth Non-secret formula

Junior high and high school youth are in a unique season of life, developing, growing, learning, practicing, experimenting, searching, and dreaming at warp speed. Yet they need adults who will take time to:

- Attend to them
- Be honest
- Trust them
- Wrestle with scripture
- Care for their questions and pains
- Advocate for them
- Listen
- Be mentors
- Share stories
- Walk with them in life and ministry
- Affirm and encourage them
- Facilitate life and faith experiences
- Be welcoming and respectful peers in ministry and leadership
- Be guides and coaches
- Join their efforts
- Help them grow in faith and character.

Youth are capable leaders and people of faith with unique gifts and insights who are part of the everyday fabric of the church and community.

Knowing this can invite you far beyond merely plugging them into or keeping them busy with being acolytes, car washers, cry room baby sitters, spaghetti dinner servers, cheap labor, reading a lesson on Youth Sunday, or being lone youth reps on church committees. They are disciples, ministers, apostles, prophets, partners, shapers, creators, and evangelists doing God's work in the world moving toward new life, simplicity, and generosity.

The non-secret formula? Being intentional, careful, and open about how we work in partnership with youth.

QUESTION: Which of these "formula ingredients" might be useful in stewardship ministry in your congregation?

MAKE IT SIMPLE and Youth Another non-secret formula

Put bursts of energy into sending out information, reminders, and invitations. The lives of everyone, especially young people, are busy and moving at a fast pace. It's difficult to remember everything on a day-to-day basis. To get and hold the attention of youth, abandon the "I-told-them-once" approach to youth ministry.

As you generate routine or spontaneous prompts, reminders, and invitations for youth throughout the year, or during MAKE IT SIMPLE:

- Work with youth to do the work of communication and invitation.
- Use brief text messages or e-mail messages.
- Use online social networking sites like Facebook.
- Send out postcards.
- Post new, fresh content frequently on a congregational Web site for youth.
- Pick up the cell phone and call.
- Talk and listen to individual youth face-to-face.
- Make sure that what's going on with youth is visible and talked about in your congregation.

Be sure to occasionally sprinkle in:

- Simple "prompt questions or ideas" for living a simple and generous life.
- Connections from life to scripture, and scripture to life.
- Real-life stories of young people in your community and congregation.
- Community service opportunities.
- Progress reports on special projects or initiatives.
- Prayer concerns.
- Condensed news stories of things going on in the world or your area.

The key to success in communicating: Keep everything short, engaging, creative, and flowing, as frequently as possible without creating stuff that feels like bothersome spam or junk mail.

QUESTION: What do these ideas suggest about your methods for communicating stewardship ideals among teenagers?