

RECRUITING VOLUNTEER MINISTRY TEAMS

When most of us think about recruiting adults to do faith formation for children, we think about asking the parents of young children, those who teach professionally, and those we already know to teach in our program. So, what is wrong with that?

THREE STORIES

In the past week, I have heard three stories that invite us all to cast our nets more widely.

FIRST

A former church staff recounted the time he ran a computer generated list of those in the congregation who had teaching experience. He proudly presented a list of 250 individuals, only to hear those in charge of recruiting pick through the list, selecting only those they already knew.

SECOND

At a Methodist church, a 93-year old called the Director of Children and Family Ministry to ask to teach Sunday school next fall. He had taught years ago and, following the death of his wife, wanted to return to this ministry.

THIRD

In worship on Sunday, it was announced that a wonderful couple was retiring from teaching Sunday school ... after 46 years in the three-year old classroom. Yes, they were young when they began, but they heard God's call to leave Jesus' fingerprints all over the three-year olds, generation after generation, long after their children and grandchildren were grown.

SO, WHAT'S THE PROBLEM WITH THAT?

We are called to raise up the priesthood of all believers, inviting all to use the gifts and talents God has showered on them to build up the body of Christ. So many members and friends of our congregations sit on the curb, waiting to be invited, afraid that the gifts they have are inadequate.

Perhaps the most important thing we can do is to invite some of the “unlikely suspects.”

Thirty-seven years ago, the confirmation director at my church invited me to teach a seventh grade class. Trust me, I was the least likely - a Lutheran for only 10 months, the mother of two preschoolers, the product of a miserable confirmation and junior high experience who promised herself she would never teach anyone in junior high anything, a woman persuaded she couldn't pray in public ... oh, the excuses went on and on. Against all odds, I said, “Yes, but only for one year!” I taught confirmation for 23 years, 13 of them as director of the program, falling madly in love with seventh and eighth graders and having the theological education of a lifetime. But it took the invitation, it took someone else naming gifts they saw in me, it took someone taking a chance on me and supporting me on this journey.

Research tells us that our older members are more likely to have a more mature faith, rich faith stories of a lifetime to share, and time and patience to do just that. Having Faith Grandparents is a gift to all of God's children.

Partnering some of our older saints with younger ones in teaching is a marvelous way to mentor new generations in doing faith formation and to create rich, cross+generational relationships.

INVITING

A former colleague taught me that an invitation for all is an invitation for none. Yes, I know it takes more time, but personal invitation can be irresistible. An approach to consider:

- When asking, name the gifts for this ministry you have seen in the individual. For example, “I have seen how warmly attentive you are with children in this congregation. They flock to you because you give them undivided attention, making each of them feel special and important.”
- Then ask, “I'd like you to consider whether God might be calling you to teach a fourth grade Sunday school class in the fall.”
- But don't ask for an immediate answer. “I'd like you to think about it and pray about it this week. I'll do the same. May I call you next week?”

Instead of asking for help, you are extending a call. God is at work.

EQUIPPING

It is vitally important that we provide good training, excellent curriculum, and ongoing support for all of our ministry volunteers. It is empowering to recruit pairs of teachers. In Luke 10, Jesus sent his followers out two by two, a powerful ministry strategy. Consider now how you will provide ongoing training, support, and curriculum that is age-appropriate. Be available and do ongoing evaluation of your program.

NEED SOME HELP? MARILYN IS AVAILABLE

I am available to do coaching and consulting around the issues of recruiting, inviting, training, supporting, and appreciating your ministry volunteers. I can help you plan your program and select curriculum, based on your context and your desired outcomes. I can also provide teacher training and support. I am the ministry partner you can't afford to hire and can't afford to do without!