



**A VISION AND
STRATEGY FOR YOUNG
MEN'S MINISTRY**

LUTHERAN MEN IN MISSION

A VISION FOR YOUNG MEN'S MINISTRY

Nathan Anenson, Lutheran Men in Mission, 2005

Lutheran Men in Mission (LMM), the men's ministry of the ELCA, has noticed something that many of us would like to ignore: so many young men (ages 18-34) are not connected with God through Jesus Christ because they can't connect with our existing churches. Young men are the age-gender group most absent from Christian faith communities. Why is that and what can we do?

It has been the assumption that young men will *return* to churches when they settle down, get married, and have kids. And for many years, this has been true to a certain extent. But we are increasingly entering a time when young men have nothing to return to. They never were a part of a community of believers!

At the same time, major shifts are taking place within society and culture as to how people—especially young people—see the world. And many times, these new and different ways of understanding life conflict with values and structures on which our churches are based. Therefore, there is something deep down that just doesn't seem right about many churches to young men. And it goes much deeper than the style of music.

Therefore, it doesn't make sense to expect young men to come to our existing worship gatherings or men's ministries. Nor will it work to try to develop a new and better program and hope young men show up. We need to put to rest the "you-come-to-us" model and deeply invest in a "we-will-go-to-you" model. The church needs to be sent out into the world!

What does this look like? When we look across the country in our congregations we see men who have walked with the Lord for more than half a century; men who have somehow stayed married to the same woman for forty years; men who have the wisdom of many years lived; and men who are by no means perfect, but are willing to share their lives. These men have something young men need. Recent research sponsored by LMM shows us that fathers and other older male figures in a young man's life are the most significant factors in shaping their adult spiritual identity. However, sometimes these men do not realize how much they have to offer and how much they are needed.

But what if these men, these men who know what it means to walk with the Lord, these men who have the wisdom of many years lived, were empowered to go to where young men are and build relationships? What if the men in our congregations caught a vision of the impact they could have on a young man? What if the lives of young men all over the country were being changed because men of God were taking risks and accepting the call to invest in the life of one young man?

How does this start? There are a number of ways to go about building relationships with young men. Included in this packet are two models to help you start thinking about what would work for your context and to empower you to make it happen.

We cannot expect young men to just show up at our church buildings. We need to go to them. And that means you building authentic relationships. God is raising up the men of our church to invest in the lives of young men. You are needed. Will you go?

“I-Go”

Identify—Invite—Invest

The “I-Go” model is a simple, organic strategy that provides a three-step process for building relationships with young men. It is based on the three “I’s” of relationship building (identifying, inviting, and investing) and upon the conviction that “*I will go*” and do this.

In this model, you don’t have to wait to get going. You just go and do it.

IDENTIFY

What young man has God put in your life? With whom do you have a natural connection? Grandson? An employee? The guy who works at the clubhouse? Your neighbor? Your friend’s son? Whoever! Identify a young man with whom you think you could connect.

INVITE

Take a risk and get to know him. Ask questions. Find out what makes him come alive. Invite him into conversation. Then invite him to do something with you. Maybe it is fishing. Maybe it is dinner. Make use of shared interests.

INVEST

Develop an ongoing relationship with the young man. Have a bi-weekly Bible study, a weekly golf outing, a monthly time to work on cars together, or a regular invitation to have supper together. Find something that works for you. And as you do something together, learn his story and share yours. Listen and be real. Live your life transparently and honestly, allowing him to see the real you. Let meaningful conversations just happen. Watch as God changes both of you.

Young men need a man to listen to them, to believe in them, and to model what life looks like with God. Identify. Invite. Invest. Keep it simple. Just build a relationship with a young man. You don’t have to be perfect; you just need to be you. God is going to do great things through you!

“TOGETHER IN MINISTRY”

Listen—Select—Empower

One model that has worked on a national level with LMM is to intentionally listen to young men, select a few with leadership potential, and then empower them to design and implement ministries with you. “Together in Ministry” works best using a team of men to carry out the three steps.

LISTEN!

Start by gathering a team of men (age forty and above) to listen to young men in a non-judgmental way. The purpose of these conversations is to start relationships and to gain an understanding of the men you are engaging in conversation. The purpose at this point is not necessarily to involve them in any activity in the congregation.

Select men age 18-34 who are:

- Members of the congregation, but not active
- Not members of the congregation
- Of various ethnic backgrounds and ages

Referrals for these conversations may come from:

- Your pastor/church directory
- Your family/friends/relationships
- Some of the young men with whom you talk

Invite a young man to lunch or dinner and let him know you would like to get to know him better. When you meet, thank him for getting together and share a small story about yourself to set the tone of the conversation. Then tell him why you are interviewing him: “We miss young men in our church. Obviously you are not coming for a good reason, and I can respect that. What I really want to do is just hear a bit more about who you are, just as you are.”

The conversations should take place in a casual setting (like a coffee shop) outside the church building. Also, have these conversations one-on-one or as a team of two dialoging with one young man, so as to not overwhelm him with a whole group of church leaders.

Use the following questions as a guide for you to help initiate conversation and get to know the young man; not simply as a strict interview outline.

LISTEN TO YOUNG MEN’S LIFE EXPERIENCE

1. Describe to me your life situation at the moment.
2. How do you spend your time... on weekdays, evenings, weekends?
3. What are your most enjoyable leisure activities?
4. What TV shows do you watch?
5. What type of music do you listen to?
6. How do you spend your income?
7. The people most active in my relationship life right now are...
8. Tell me about your family relationships and how they are going for you.
9. Describe a recent experience with friends or family that was meaningful for you.
10. A current struggle for me is....

LISTEN TO YOUNG MEN'S SPIRITUALITY

1. Thinking back on your life, what were some events that helped to shape who you are now?
2. Tell me about some people who have strongly influenced you.
3. What really matters to you?
4. What are some values or principles that are important to you?
5. What moments in your life would you describe as being meaningful?
6. Describe an event in your past that you would name as being "spiritual" in some way?
7. What are some of your biggest hopes for the future?
8. What are your thoughts about "God" as a "higher power"?

LISTEN TO YOUNG MEN'S (FAITH) PRACTICES

1. What refreshes you, or gives you strength?
2. What makes you feel really "alive"?
3. What keeps you going when things are difficult?
4. What is a balanced life for you?
5. What do you do to "get centered", to gain focus in your life?
6. When or where do you have a sense of peace?
7. My feelings about religion are...
8. If you had one message for the men's ministry leaders in our congregation, what would it be?

SELECT!

Gather together as a leadership team.

Without sharing names, discuss:

1. What were the common themes?
2. What surprised you?
3. How is your men's ministry/congregation dealing with the common themes?

Among those you spoke with, who demonstrated leadership capabilities? Those:

1. Able to articulate his concerns
2. Who seem to be a person other guys would follow
3. Who have some sense of what the church needs to be about in order to reach this generation.

Invite 2-4 of those with leadership potential to meet with your leadership team.

EMPOWER!

Agenda:

1. Share your notes from the last meeting, telling the younger men what you *think* you heard, and ask them for validation or correction.
2. When you have been assured that you have heard what the young men were saying, talk about the kind of activities/programs/ministries/relationships that will deal with the issues and themes you heard the young men talk about.
3. With newsprint, cluster the themes/issues that surfaced.
4. What do the young men think are the most crucial issues to deal with first?
5. What is needed to address these issues?
6. How, who, when?

Remember, the point of this is not for the older men to provide programs/ministry for younger men. It is to give permission and empower younger men to develop ministry (along with middle and older age men).

Many young men will be suspicious of what you want from them. You must earn their trust. As you do, be open to what ministry with young men looks like and make it happen together!

WHY BUILD INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS?

1. Young men are the group most disconnected from Christian communities.
2. Young men say they want older men in their lives.
3. Faith and what it means to be a man is passed down from one man to another.
4. Many young men don't have dads because of divorce, death, or because the father is absent emotionally and spiritually.
5. Many young men don't have extended family nearby (grandfathers, uncles, etc.).
6. Many young men don't trust institutions/organized religion. Faith and masculinity must be passed down organically through relationships. Young men must witness real men live real lives (in all its messiness) with the real Jesus.
7. Many young men are confused over the difference between the way the world should be (the way they want it to be) and the way the world is. Intergenerational relationships can provide some clarity amongst the confusion.
8. Young men have a sense that at some point they will need to step up and make a difference. In other generations this was more defined. Now young men wonder, "how?" "why?" "can I?" Intergenerational relationships can help answer these questions.
9. Older men are blessed with experience and wisdom to be a blessing. They get to make a difference in young men's' lives.
10. Young men can be a wonderful blessing in the lives of older men, bringing new purpose, life, and energy.

WHO CAN HELP?

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