



Sharing the Good News!

Penn Northeast Conference of the United Church of Christ

"Youth and Young Adults...The Church NOW!"

It happened quite unexpectedly, or serendipitously I should say. I was in the midst of reading the latest United Church National News, April/May 2009 edition, when I got a call at my office. The call was from a local church council president who had also read the UCC news and wanted to talk to me about the things he read.

If you have not yet read this edition PLEASE DO SO. On pages 6-10 you will find a host of articles about Youth and Young Adults in relationship to the national UCC and to the local church. Page 2 contains an article by John Thomas, in which he shares his reflections on his own experience as a youth in a local church and his views of the needs and gifts which youth bring to the UCC.

Mentioned in the other articles, perhaps not in the same words I would use, are beliefs I have long held in regard to Christian formation with youth and young adults:

- * Youth are not the future of the church they are the church NOW!
- * Youth need relationships in the church. They need a place to speak freely and lead and be accepted for who they are. They need a place to be safe and included.
- * Youth desire to serve others. Cleaning up after a church dinner is not a service project! Service means outside of the church walls!!!
- * When working with youth, adults MUST be authentic and genuine. Whether you are a youth advisor, teacher, pastor or confirmation mentor you are a role model. Youth look to you to be a person of integrity about your faith. Youth and young adults can spot a phony a mile away!

* Engage youth in meaningful conversations. Ask them about their interests, their joys, their concerns, and passions.

* Ministry with and to youth and young adults is a MINISTRY not program which adults create and hope youth will come. Let the voices of the youth speak to what they need!

* Youth communicate in a sophisticated "technological" language and the church needs to communicate with them in that way if we want to get and keep their attention!

Perhaps the most intriguing piece I read in the UCC news was the article on page 9, entitled *Dear Church: An Open Letter from Young People*. The writer opens with a riveting statement about how youth **need the church** and a spiritual home. The writer closes the letter with these words: "So here is our challenge to you: reach out to us; encourage us; invite us to the table; and treat us as whole, vital members of the church. Oh yeah, and could you send me a care package?"

There is much more to write about ministry with youth and young adults. In the coming months across several venues I will be exploring with youth and youth advisors of PNEC the questions:

What is God's dream for you?

What is God's dream for the church?

What is God's dream for youth and young adult ministries in PNEC?

God is still speaking to us and to youth and young adults in our midst! To be continued...

Grace and Peace,

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