

How Radically Committed to Each Other is Your Church?

by Carol Duerksen

MATERIALS AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- Copies of the article at the end of this session or *With Magazine*, Spring 09
- An assortment of unusual hats—at least one per student

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS:

Welcome students and invite them to check out the assortment of hats. Then say: *Pick a hat and wear it based on this statement: "This hat symbolizes how radically committed to each other our church is because _____."*

Go around the group and ask students to share why they chose the hat they are wearing.

EXPLORE THE TOPIC:

Hand out the copies of the article or *With Magazines* and read "Communal Prodding and Affirmation."

Discuss:

- Would our youth group do this? Why or why not?
- Would we like to do more of this?
- How much does this happen in our church?
- Would we like to have more of this happen in our church? Why or why not?

APPLY AND RESPOND:

Option 1: If your group is ready to "go there," do it—give both affirmation and constructive criticism to each one. Talk about personality and behavior, things that inspire and things that tick each other off, things they are saddened by and things that bring joy.

Other options: If your group isn't ready to be this open and honest, that's fine. Here are several options:

- 1 Invite your pastor(s) and/or elders to come visit with your youth about how they encourage church members to be "radically committed to each other."

- 2 Invite church members to come share examples of when they felt the church community “being there” for them. If possible, include examples when church people challenged as well as affirmed each other.
- 3 Invite a social worker or psychologist to come give some tips on how to creatively confront and affirm each other.

Session Reproducibles

COMMUNAL PRODDING AND AFFIRMATION

by Ben Kreider

In the summer of 2008, the youth group from the Bethel College Mennonite Church in Kansas traveled to Evansville, Indiana, to volunteer for a week at Patchwork Central, a community center working with children in art, gardening, singing, storytelling, etc. This article is adapted from a reflection given by Ben Kreider during worship at BCMC on July 28, 2008.

Something happened our last night in Evansville. It all started around midnight. The adults had gone to sleep, and we youth were still up. We gathered in a room and went around the circle of friends—person by person—and gave both affirmation and constructive criticism to one another. We spoke of personality and behavior, things that inspired us and things that ticked us off, things we were saddened by and things that brought us joy.

Wisdom and truth were spoken, and it was wonderful to hear and to respond. By hearing everyone's perspectives we gained new insight not only into the person being spoken of but also into the speaker. I saw others in a new light after knowing how they see me. The wise thoughts of one prompted more wise thoughts from the rest.

Those awake that night caught a glimpse of the kingdom of God and the church. Perhaps we did not just catch it, but we also participated in it. We in that circle care for and love one another enough that we will tell each other when something needs changing or is a hurtful behavior. We pushed each other to live up to our words and to be consistent in all our actions. The important thing is that we pushed one another to make change, or at least envisioned it. We the youth, we the congregation, and we the church form a circle of accountability. This must continue and grow, especially in small groups talking late into the night, but also in the much larger church.

Before we critiqued, we encouraged, thanking one another for all of the good things each one does. The group brought out the best in everybody and made it known for all to hear. It was affirming to hear what in me inspired others. I was inspired when I heard friends bring out the commendable that I had failed to notice in each person. I saw good things in myself that I had never seen before. I think we all did. All of us offered knowledge that brought new layers of depth and understanding to our group and to ourselves.

It was refreshing that a discussion such as this was activated with a group of high schoolers—of peers. Maybe it's a sign of the way our youth group has grown in the past years—the closeness we feel, our willingness to speak our mind, and our acceptance of one another. It was a wonderful thing not only to see but to be part of.

Many of us hope to actually be the church and be followers of Jesus. It isn't going to happen if we're complacent, and it isn't just for us as individuals. It will happen with small groups of people who dearly love one another and want to make some good change. We will be the church through communal prodding and affirmation, harsh words of prophecy and soft words of comfort, calls to action and calls home.

Session Reproducibles

The step that follows an evening of words is a day of work. This is something with which we will always struggle. The challenge to me and the challenge to us as a community of believers is to walk the path we believe in. Our life for a week in Evansville was a walk down that path. Every day we got up and we walked, because we had a community to listen to, talk with and join together in action.

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