



# EQUIPPING FOR... **CHRISTIAN EDUCATION**

## Creating an Innovative Youth Program

Produced by Canadian Ministries

*“And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you.”*  
– 1 Thessalonians 3:12

**Y**outh ministry is as challenging, multi-faceted and complicated as the times we live in. It involves

- being in relationship with young people who may never worship with us
- being part of high energy gatherings
- learning about social media
- participating in conversations that may require attentive listening and sensitive responding, as youth express a range of emotions and test out ideas about themselves and the world.

Most central to youth ministry is enabling youth to be in relationship with peers and adults in which they glimpse God’s unceasing and unconditional love. Youth carry these experiences into their daily lives where they may feel anything but loved. Instead they often have feelings of low self-esteem, anxiety, loneliness and being misunderstood. It is sometimes said that “it takes a village to raise a child,” and youth ministry research suggests that youth will develop stronger faith if they can build relationships with a number of adults of all ages.

### Reflection

The two stories that appear on the following pages describe different, creative approaches to youth ministry by Canadian Presbyterian congregations. Both initiatives received financial support from the Creative Ministry with Children and Youth Fund (see back page). After reading them

- 1 Note the details that have contributed to their success.
- 2 Identify and reflect on the youth ministry program(s) in your community.
- 3 List the different ways that you and your church might help to strengthen and ensure the sustainability of local youth ministry.
- 4 Pray for wisdom and guidance for yourself and your church. End with the prayer that follows.

### Prayer

Loving God, in a world where we can feel lonely in a crowd, we are not alone: you are with us. In a world where it is hard to know who we are, you have created us in your image and called us by name.

In a world where we are called to serve, we seek to follow Christ, to be led by Spirit, and to be part of a community where we see you face to face. God, show us the way. Amen.

(Based on worship resources of Canada Youth 2014)

### Get Started! TORCH Youth Ministry

by Colin Cross, Minister, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Penticton, B.C.



Since I became the minister of St. Andrew's Presbyterian in Penticton in 1997, the congregation has offered many summertime day camps for children. Previously they were always fully subscribed but more recently we had five young people register for one camp, and seven campers attended the other. I found this shocking, particularly given that the organizer of one camp—a neighbouring church 20 km away—had sent out over 1,000 leaflets to homes in the area.

#### Origins

In light of this I wondered what to do about my long time hope to start a vital youth ministry at St. Andrew's. Though I was energetic and committed, realistically what could one person do? But the answer was really very simple: Get started! And so in November 2011, I approached a colleague, the local Anglican rector, and asked him if his parish would co-sponsor with St. Andrew's PC a series of events for youth—as an “experiment.” He agreed. Together we offered four events, beginning with a Ski Retreat in February 2012. We were elated when the turnout was between eight and ten for each event; and we agreed that there was potential for more and better. Two of the events were led by a gifted St. Andrew's member and former youth minister who was keenly interested in being involved in youth ministry again.

#### Objective and plan

In June 2012, my colleague and I met to share our hopes and dreams. We agreed on the objective—a self-sustaining youth program—and we agreed on a three-step plan to achieve it. We would

- 1 Assemble an ecumenical coalition of like-minded churches.
- 2 Form a non-profit society.
- 3 Begin funding the venture independently.

This plan recognized that

- No one local church had the financial resources to underwrite ministry of this kind, and
- The program would have greater strength working together with other churches.

By August 2012 we had called a meeting of interested persons from five other churches and given birth to “Torch Youth Ministries.” At the time we wrote, “TORCH stands for the TORCH of FAITH, HOPE and LOVE to young people, wherever they are at in their own lives and faith journeys.” Regular youth group meetings began in September.

#### Three years later



Almost three years later TORCH is still going strong. Two youth groups have been formed, with Juniors (Grades 5-7) and Seniors (Grades 8-12), meeting Sunday and Monday nights, respectively. About 25 youth attend each meeting, with a steady stream of enquirers, guests, and “drop-ins” showing up every week.

TORCH gatherings, like youth meetings everywhere, combine fun and frivolity with deep spiritual inquiry. Youth minister Tony Moura writes, “Our youth talked about what the devastating events in Nepal mean to us in Penticton. ‘What could we do?’ we asked ourselves. We talked about past tragedies and what amazing people were able to do in those countries affected. We prayed and asked God for



miracles ‘for those that should not survive, to survive—and be rescued.’ And four days later there was a story about a baby found in the wreckage alive... a miracle. Praise God! We also talked about two young people in our community who had recently taken their lives. We prayed for their families, and for all those who are in any way affected by their deaths.”

From the beginning, TORCH has attracted youth from all walks of life and all faiths, even some youth with no faith at all. “TORCH is a place where YOU can be YOU,” reads our byline. It’s “a Youth Group where EVERYONE is welcome.” As a result of this, TORCH has been granted permission to advertise its presence in the community on local high school—and middle school—campuses; and subscription to the groups is increasing. In a day and age of increasing secularity, this is unprecedented. Check us out on Facebook <http://facebook.com/torchyouthministry> or email us at [torchsociety@hotmail.ca](mailto:torchsociety@hotmail.ca).

### What makes faith stick?

From six years of research that included a longitudinal study of 500 youth group graduates during their first three years in college, research findings from the Fuller Youth Institute (FYI) provide these insights on instilling lasting faith in young people:

- 1 Teenagers need to build relationships with adults of all ages, in addition to being part of strong youth groups.
- 2 Churches and families overestimate youth group graduates’ readiness for the struggles ahead.
- 3 Teaching young people the “dos” and “don’ts” of Christian living is important but an overemphasis on behaviors can sabotage faith long-term.

Excerpts from September 7, 2011 Press Release available at <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/sticky-faith/press-release>

### Learning and Sharing Faith: The Bethel Youth Project

*by Kim Webster, Christian Education Worker, Bethel Presbyterian Church, Scotburn, Nova Scotia*

The original plan for the high school youth was that they would be hosted each month by a family from the congregation. They would cook dinner together and spend time learning and sharing their faith. We held numerous youth nights in this format. The youth and adult response was very positive. Youth and adults from the congregation were placed in a situation where they had to interact more than they would on a regular Sunday morning. Of course, the plan for the youth and adults to cook dinner together never went as planned: we always arrived to a great feast which the adult hosts had already prepared! However, youth still helped clean up and our hosts always took part in our study time.



### Feedback from youth and leader

Six months into the year, I spoke with the youth and asked for feedback on our dinner nights. They loved spending time with other adults, and being invited to their homes. One youth was absolutely thrilled to invite us to his grandparents’ farm for dinner—even going so far as to request his grandmother make his favourite meal complete with dessert! This dinner community has quickly grown and become important to our high school youth.

The youth spoke highly of being invited into the homes of members of the congregation. They loved being able to get to know people better, and even share their own grandparents with the group! One thing



they missed, however, was regular youth nights at the church. So they were added back to the program. While we met at the homes of others, we also met a few nights at the church. The youth cooked dinner together in the church kitchen, followed by games and exploring their faith. The community building and growth that has taken place over dinner has had a huge impact on our small group time. I find the youth are speaking out more, sharing their thoughts and asking more questions about their faith.

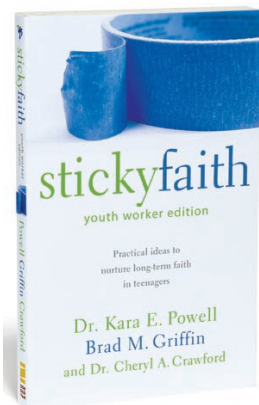
I have seen a lot of growth in the way the youth interact with each other and how they explore their faith. One high school youth was able to attend Canada Youth 2014, and 22 youth attended the Atlantic Synod Youth weekend in PEI in May. Nine high school students attended confirmation class in the spring and affirmed their faith to join Bethel in June. There is no doubt that my ability to spend more time with this group has increased the number of high school youth attending youth events and provided them with a consistent space in which to share and explore their faith.

### More about Sticky Faith research

Expanded analyses of the Sticky Faith research and implications can be found in these two books published by Zondervan Publishing:

- *Sticky Faith: Everyday ideas to build lasting faith in your kids* by Dr. Kara E. Powell and Dr. Chap Clark, 2012
- *Sticky Faith, Youth Worker Edition: Practical ideas to nurture long-term faith in teenagers* by Dr. Kara E. Powell, Brad M. Griffin, and Dr. Cheryl A. Crawford, 2011

For more information on the research, visit <http://stickyfaith.org>



### What is the Creative Ministry with Children and Youth Fund?

The Creative Ministry with Children and Youth Fund provides opportunities for ministries to offer dynamic programs that nurture faith in children and youth. This fund goes beyond providing finances to support a youth group leader or existing programs—instead, it is designed to inspire the denomination to think creatively and offer innovative programming for children and youth that could be a model for, or a way to experience, ministry across the country. Think large or think small: this fund partners with ministries to offer exciting opportunities to launch and sustain vibrant programs for children and youth with The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

To read about other successful programs across the denomination supported by the fund, go to <http://presbyterian.ca/creative-ministry-with-children-and-youth-fund/>.

Details about fund disbursements, expectations and the application requirements can be found at <http://presbyterian.ca/funds/> or call 1-800-619-7301.

### Canadian Ministries wants to hear from you!

What parts of this resource are most useful? Share your story of youth ministry. Recommend a resource! Make a suggestion or ask a question!

Contact us at [canadianministries@presbyterian.ca](mailto:canadianministries@presbyterian.ca) or call 416-441-1111 or 1-800-619-7301 ext. 271. Find us on Facebook at [facebook.com/pconnect](https://facebook.com/pconnect).