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Volunteer-led youth ministry 28

EFCA TODAY



CATALYST

the passion of EFCA's young leaders

Not “Just” Volunteers

✦ The joys of a volunteer-led youth ministry by Jennifer M. Kvamme

Volunteer leader Taylor Hoffer, below, hangs a new banner on the youth building at Centennial EFC. He's one of eight on this all-volunteer team, which includes college senior John Stromberg (opposite page, in glasses), who serves as director of teaching and discipleship.

JENNIFER KVAMME

“THANKS FOR BEING WILLING to take all this food to the food shelf,” I said to Dan, whom we affectionately refer to as the youth-group butler.

“No problem; it's my job,” Dan responded. “Besides, Pastor Larry said he'd double my pay.”

We both laughed. We don't do it for the money—none of us gets a salary. We do it because we love it.

Centennial EFC is one of the vast majority of Protestant churches that don't have a paid youth pastor and rely completely on volunteers.¹ When our youth pastor left three years ago to plant a church and the elders decided not to replace him, I was the biggest skeptic. I had grown up in a church with a great youth pastor, and I'd interned with multiple youth pastors.

I knew that youth ministry was more than a full-time job. How would we ever be able to do it with just volunteers?

When they asked me to be the coordinator and keep the volunteers organized, I was already working another full-time job. But I said yes, with some boundaries. And God has used this experience to completely change my mind about volunteers.

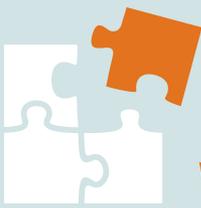
It took time to build a solid volunteer team and settle into our roles. Now I train the volunteers, plan trips and communicate with parents, and I love what I do. But I also love what I *don't* do.

John does the weekly teaching and worship leading. Dan—our beloved butler, who just accepted Christ his last year of high school and begged us to let him stick around and help out—sets up chairs, vacuums and runs errands. Jann serves as the youth-group “mom” and takes care of the snack shop and the World Vision child we sponsor.

I could go on and on about all seven of our amazing volunteers. But instead, let me tell you what I have come to love about volunteer-led youth ministry:

1. *No one is expected to do everything.* Church leaders, parents and youth recognize that we have other jobs and are just giving of our “extra” time.
2. For the same reasons, *people really appreciate the work we do.*
3. *We do what we're gifted to do and don't do what we're not.* With limited time, we pick the crucial things that fit our gifting. Someone else has to pick up the rest, or it doesn't get done. And that's OK.





WITHOUT A YOUTH PASTOR OF YOUR OWN?

1 Register for Enroute—EFCA's one-day training experience for paid and volunteer youth workers. Attend with a team from your church and receive a discount. For more information, visit www.efca.org/reachnational/student-ministries and look under "training."

2 Sign up for free online training with Cadre Ministries (www.cadreministries.com), a group that equips church volunteers.

3 Consider these resources:

- *Your First Two Years in Youth Ministry*, by Doug Fields. The sequel to Purpose-Driven® Youth Ministry,

this book addresses 12 valuable steps that will help readers take the first steps as they begin their ministry.

- *Ministry Is Relationships*, by Cadre Ministries. A four-hour training session on why relationships are God's mode of operation for changing lives. (Contact Cadre Ministries for pricing and more details: www.cadreministries.com).

- *Experiencing Leadershift*, by Don Cousins. A great book on applying the Ephesians 4:11,12 principle—equipping your volunteer saints to do the work of ministry.

- *Grow, Minister, and Lead* (books 1 & 2), by Bill Allison and Dave Garda (\$15.00 each). Essential training sessions for well-equipped volunteers.

- *Sustainable Youth Ministry*, by Mark DeVries. Why do youth ministries crumble? And what is the cost to students, parents, volunteers and church staff? Based on his own experience and on interviews with churches in crisis, DeVries pinpoints problems and provides practical tools and structures.

- *Recruiting, Motivating, and Retaining Volunteers in the Church*, by Bill Allison. Practical insights into helping ministry leaders recruit and equip volunteers.

- *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World*, by Chap Clark & Kara E. Powell. Overview of important aspects of youth ministry.



AMEN TO VOLUNTEERS!

Entrusting the ministry to people is very nearly the same as entrusting the ministry to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who is at work in the lives of both our students and our volunteers. Our job as leaders is to equip people and then free them to do the work of ministry. We cannot afford not to entrust ministry to volunteers. If we don't feel we can trust our volunteers with our students, then we really need to ask ourselves if we are fulfilling our God-given task of equipping the saints.

— GREG LUND, senior pastor, Frederic (Wis.) EFC, a 30-year-old congregation whose student ministry is led by a six-member volunteer team

4. *This leaves a lot of opportunity for student leaders and young leaders to step up.* We formed a student ministry team, and they love to help plan events, connect with newcomers and do student-to-student discipleship. We're also glad to add recent graduates to our adult leadership team. And why not—we've been training them for seven years!

Youth pastors play an invaluable role. But as a word of encouragement for those of you without one: I love being a volunteer, I love our volunteer team and I wouldn't choose to do ministry any other way right now. ■

¹ "Pastors Paid Better, But Attendance Unchanged," *The Barna Update*, March 29, 2001, www.barna.org

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TAYLOR HOFFER