



# Standards & Guidelines for professionals

## INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen an increase in the level of professionalism of those who serve in children, youth and family ministry in ELCA congregations. Professional youth ministers have sought to be taken seriously in the life of the church, and greater opportunities for education, training and credibility have developed. The ELCA Youth Ministry Network has developed, as part of its vision and mission, “Standards and Guidelines” for excellence in children, youth and family ministry.

In many ways, the spirit of this document is as important as its content. The spirit that surrounds these “Standards and Guidelines” is about creating a learning community of youth ministers; a community that seeks to support and network with each other, as we live out our calls in ministry, while also challenging each other, the ministries in which we serve, and the discipline of youth ministry, as a whole, to fully live into and out of a vibrant and growing vision for ministry with those in the first third of life. This is no small task, but we believe it is timely and worthy of our commitment.

Inherent in creating any “Standards and Guidelines” is a tension, a tension that for many rubs up against the entrepreneurial thread and evangelical nature that’s been a part of youth ministry for decades and the reality that no list will cover all that one needs to know in working with young people. Yet, to do nothing, as has been the case for decades, seems futile. Living without such a document or set of guidelines is irresponsible to the young people and their families with which we do ministry and disregards youth ministry as a field of study with a set of particular skills and practices. So, the ELCA Youth Ministry Network moves forward, bold and humble at the same time, seeking to create a fruitful and hospitable learning community for those ministering with young people.

These “Standards and Guidelines” will never be complete, nor will anyone master all of them. Enduring understandings and competencies will change over time and as a learning community, we will seek to faithfully attend to these realities. In the meantime, engage this document and let it challenge you to grow, all while you have an eye toward the young people you are called to serve.

Personal and Professional growth is vital to the development of any ministry leader. These “Standards and Guidelines” focus mainly on the professional growth side of that coin, while acknowledging and lifting up the reality that growth happens within the framework of personal renewal, continuing education, networking, and relational support. Therefore, these “Standards and Guidelines” are not intended as a “check list” or something one fully completes, rather they are a set of core understandings and competencies that are essential for professional development.

In that spirit and with that framework, the Network is fully committed to these “Standards and Guidelines.” For the Network, this means that it will work to create ways of helping youth ministry professionals find training opportunities and support systems that can help them grow. It also means that the Network will frame its work and resources around helping youth ministry leaders grow in these areas.

## THE ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS AND COMPETENCIES:

All professionals in youth ministry come with a level of competency for ministry. At the same time, youth ministry professionals are life-long learners who continue to deepen their competency in all areas of ministry throughout their career. It is our expectation that an adult who works with youth would be able to demonstrate understanding and growing competency in the following areas:

- I. Theological Thought and reflection
- II. Youth and Family Proficiencies
- III. Administrative and Leadership Efficiencies
- IV. Practical Leadership Skills

## I. THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT AND REFLECTION

In order to remain faithful to Scripture and to the Lutheran Confessions, an understanding of ministry is necessarily shaped by theological thought and reflection. Youth and Family ministers will commit to learning endeavors (workshops, conferences, college and seminary courses, etc.) which will equip and challenge them to describe, analyze, and evaluate their own ministries in particular and the subject of ministry in general. The four subject areas listed here are presented as a disciplinary framework for the purpose of shaping and facilitating theological thought and reflection for the sake of ministry. Youth and family ministers, in order to develop a robust understanding of ministry, are expected to discourse knowledgeably under each of the four subject areas below.

### *1. Biblical Studies (both old and New Testaments)*

- Know the overall biblical narrative
- Know how to find one's way around the biblical text
- Able to work with the Bible as a living text of God's people
- Able to articulate the gospel in one's own words

### *2. Lutheran theology and confessional writing*

- Know the teachings of Lutheran reformers
- Know Lutheran theological commitments, especially the Augsburg Confession and the Catechisms
- Confess Jesus Christ as Lord and participate in God's work in the world
- Able to utilize one's confessional commitments in ministry

### *3. Lutheran church history (in particular in our North American context)*

- Know the Reformation history
- Understand the story of the Lutheran church in North America
- Able to speak to the ecclesiological and contextual realities of the Lutheran church in North American in particular time periods

### *4. Systematic theology*

- Awareness of a variety of theological schools of thought
- Know and utilize particular theological ideas in ministry
- Understand the fullness of God's mission in the world
- Understand and able to contribute in theological discourse

## II. YOUTH AND FAMILY PROFICIENCIES

Youth and family ministry is by its nature interdisciplinary. The 12 proficiencies listed below provide a glimpse of the breadth and depth of this interdisciplinary work. All of these areas are vital to effective youth and family ministries. We believe, however, that basic competency should be demonstrated in at least 6 of these 12 categories, with the goal being developing competency in all areas. It is important to recognize that all 12 of these proficiency areas is a discipline in and of itself. Therefore, the ultimate goal is not to master one or more areas, but to help foster life-long learning.

### *1. Human and faith development of children, youth, and their family*

- Understand family systems theory
- Able to apply family systems theory within various ministry settings
- Understand human development theory, particularly those in the first third of life
- Know strategies and practices for developmentally appropriate ministry for children and youth and their families
- Able to come alongside parents in nurturing faith development in children and youth

## *2. Inter-generational ministry*

- Understand the generations and their relationships to one another
- Know strategies and practices for intergenerational ministry
- Able to create and nurture bridges between various developmental life stages
- Able to relate to and lead various generations in ministry practices

## *3. Marking Faith and Life Transitions*

- Understand the baptismal journey across a lifetime
- Understand the communal nature of discipleship and Christian practices
- Understand and nurture vocation as part of discipleship
- Able to identify and mark faith and life intersections
- Able to lead Christian practices that mark faith and life intersections

## *4. Christian education ministry*

- Understand learning styles and learning theory
- Able to apply learning style and learning theory
- Understand and articulate the Christian aspect of Christian education
- Able to assess curriculum based on theological, educational and contextual commitments
- Able to develop curriculum based on theological, educational and contextual commitments
- Able to train and equip leaders for educational ministries

## *5. Spiritual and Faith Practices, including worship, Bible study and prayer*

- Understand the role of Christian practices in Christian community and faith development
- Able to articulate a theology of worship.
- Able to craft and lead meaningful worship, particularly with an eye toward those in the first third of life
- Know a variety of prayer styles
- Able to weave regular prayer practices into ministry with, for and by those in the first third of life
- Know various styles for engaging God's living Word
- Able to lead engaging Bible study with young people and their families

## *6. Pastoral Care, including counseling and conflict resolution*

- Understand the emotional and spiritual nature of the human
- Understand crisis theory and crisis management
- Know a variety of strategies and resources for working with young people in crisis
- Able to lead people, particularly youth, through times of crisis
- Understand boundary formation
- Able to create and tend environments that are safe, physically, emotionally and spiritually

## *7. Youth leadership development*

- Understand leadership as a multi-faceted enterprise
- Know leadership styles/strengths
- Able to see beyond the immediate situation and draw young people into a new future
- Able to identify and nurture the gifts and passions of young people
- Able to give young people leadership opportunities

## *8. Gifts assessment*

- Awareness of various gifts assessment tools
- Trained in using 1 or more gifts assessment tools
- Understanding of spiritual gifts
- Able to teach on spiritual gifts
- Able to help others discover and develop their own gifts
- Able to assist others in matching their gifts with ministry opportunities

#### *9. Retreat/outdoor ministry development*

- Familiar with various outdoor and retreat ministry approaches
- Understand the unique aspect retreat/outdoor ministry offers of being church
- Know a variety strategies and practices for retreat/outdoor ministry
- Able to lead various retreat/outdoor ministry practices
- Able to create a sense of community in a retreat/outdoor ministry setting

#### *10. Mission/servant events and cross cultural training*

- Able to plan logistics of mission/servant events/trips
- Capable of fostering partnerships with mission partners
- Knowledge of cross-cultural and accompaniment theories
- Able to equip others in understanding cross-cultural and accompaniment theories
- Able to lead people through servant-learning reflection process
- Able to frame mission/service theologically
- Able to place mission/service activities within a larger scope of ministry

#### *11. Campus/College-age Ministry*

- Know young adult theories
- Able to foster spiritual relationships with young adults
- Understand campus ministry as a vibrant expression of the church
- Able to draw young adults into ministry with and for their peers and the world
- Able to foster ministry partnerships

#### *12. Congregational awareness of youth and family ministries*

- Understand congregations, and intergenerational communities, as a vital part of discipleship
- Understand the role congregation's play in nurturing faith for those in the first third of life
- Understand the role of the leader in change and organizational development
- Able to connect a vision for those in the first third of life with a vision for the congregation as a whole
- Able to lead change within a community

### **III. ADMINISTRATIVE AND LEADERSHIP PROFICIENCIES**

Administration, planning and leadership are all vital aspects of any ministry. For those working with young people, these administrative and leadership proficiencies are of particular importance:

#### *1. Safe Haven Management*

- Aware of and initiate best practices that keep young people, staff, and volunteers safe
- Develop and implement policies and programs that are legally sound and in line with state and county regulations
- Develop and implement policies, screening, training, and supervision for those working with those in the first third of life, paid and unpaid
- Foster excellent and appropriate referrals for professional help for youth and their families

#### *2. Ministry Administration*

- Develop and implement a ministry plan
- Able to effectively tend ministry finances, including fundraising and budgeting
- Able to recruit, train, empower and evaluate teams of volunteer leaders
- Create and carry out effective publicity and communication of ministry
- Able to handle conflict management, within leadership and ministry as a whole

### *3. Strategic Planning*

- Understand the immediate ministry needs, as well as a particular new future
- Able to lead a vision process with a team
- Able to articulate ministry outcomes
- Able to lead ministry with young people toward articulated ministry outcomes
- Able to create and nurture a leadership team
- Able to lead and participate in ministry evaluation processes
- Able to access ministry with regard to one's particular contextual realities

## **IV. PRACTICAL LEADERSHIP SKILLS**

At the heart of professional ministry with young people is the ability to gracefully move between theory, theology and praxis. In other words, the ultimate goal of professional youth ministry is to have one's leadership on the lines of ministry informed and shaped by theology and theory AND to have one's leading of ministry on the front line of ministry challenge and deepen one's understanding of theology and theory. This practice-reflection process has tied with it several core leadership skills. The ten named practical leadership skills are for some natural gifts, and for others skills that develop over time. All youth ministers will have some of both. What is critical here is that all youth workers develop at least baseline skills in each of these areas.

### *1. Create nurturing relationships*

- Able to make relational connections with young people
- Able to make relational connections with parents of young people
- Able to work with young people and family in crisis
- Able to engage young people in ministry through relationships

### *2. Effective Communication and Teaching Skills*

- Able to present to large groups
- Able to lead small groups
- Able to teach youth and adults
- Able to preach
- Able to utilize technology and media in various teaching and learning situations

### *3. Servant, Collaborative leadership*

- Able to lead others
- Able to gather and develop a ministry team
- Able to provide direction for a leadership team
- Able to share leadership responsibilities
- Able to effectively problem solve

### *4. Read cultural landscape and contextual realities*

- Able to read and interpret culture with an eye toward the impact on ministry
- Able to see subcultures within the larger cultural context
- Able to plan and evaluate ministry with regard to one's ministry context

### *5. Pastoral Care Skills*

- Able to understand human behavior
- Able to offer practical, caring pastoral care to those in the first third of life and their families
- Able to read and tend to one's own spiritual, relational, and emotional health
- Actively engage in a personal care "plan" for one's self

### *6. Effectively Communicate the Gospel, in word and deed, to those unfamiliar with the church*

- Able to share one's personal faith story with others
- Is fluent in the language of faith
- Communicates the Christian faith in words and actions
- Seeks relationships with people not currently active in a faith community

### *7. Lead Missional Ministries*

- Create and implement ministry that engage the world
- Able to serve the neighbor through various ministries and activities
- Integrate service and justice into ministry practices

### *8. Serve as a Life Coach*

- Understands and leads out of a vocational framework
- Encourages others to integrate faith in their daily life
- Utilizes daily life as theological inquiry
- Helps others discern the intersection of faith and life
- Call out people's gifts

### *9. Active Life of Discipleship*

- Bear witness to an active and vibrant God in their own life
- Participant in Christian practices within a community of faith
- Seeks spiritual growth, both alone and with others

### *10. Organizational Skills*

- Able to develop and carry out ministry plan
- Able to effectively handle the financial aspects of ministry
- Able to work in collaboration with other ministry leaders
- Able to complete work in a timely manner

## **CONCLUSION**

Personal and professional growth is vital to the development of any ministry leader. The ELCA Youth Ministry Network not only believes in these enduring competencies and understandings, but also seek to be a resource in supporting youth and family ministry leaders in such growth. Therefore they suggest the following:

- Maintaining annual membership in the ELCA Youth Ministry Network.
- Participating in at least one ELCA YM Network Extravaganza or other ELCA Network event every three years.
- Participating in at least 20 contact hours of quality continuing education annually.
- Participate in coaching or mentoring relationships
- Networking with other Youth and Family ministry professionals
- Participation in local, synodical, regional, and churchwide continuing education and networking events.