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## Young Leaders in Adult Settings

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*"...Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the Lord.*" (Jeremiah 1:7-8 NIV)

### A Word to Young Leaders

What a great opportunity you have! It is an honor and a privilege; an awesome opportunity and an awesome responsibility to share yourself and your gifts as a member of the body of Christ.

As you serve on a committee, board or council in your congregation or synod, you will have a chance to learn more about yourself, others and the ministry of God's people in your community, country and world. You will also have an opportunity to contribute to the vital work of the church through the gifts, abilities, enthusiasm and perspectives which you alone possess.

Committees, boards and councils can be intimidating for any newcomer, regardless of that person's age or experience. But don't forget, everyone on your committee had to attend their first meeting sometime! You have been selected for a reason and God has plans for you in this unfamiliar setting. God will give you everything that you need to be a success in this experience. As you prepare to serve in your new position, there are many things that you can do to ease the transition. Consider these:

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### Five Commandments for Young Leaders in Adult Settings

- I. *Know everything you can about your position*  
Ask your pastor or chairperson for a copy of your congregational or synodical constitution or bylaws that would describe the work of your committee and your role as a member. Ask an experienced member to explain any parts of the description that are unclear.
- II. *Take your position seriously...*  
...And you will be taken seriously. Be punctual. Be prepared. Carefully read everything you receive. Bring a pen and paper to take notes at every meeting. Follow through in a prompt and organized manner with every task or responsibility.
- III. *Find a Friend*  
At each meeting, sit beside an experienced member whom you feel most comfortable with. Use this person as a resource, mentor and guide. If someone refers to something unfamiliar to you, ask this person for an explanation.
- IV. *Learn to Walk the Walk, and Talk the Talk*  
Committees, boards and councils are each very different. Their meetings may be informal, like a "popcorn" discussion on a given topic with no established guidelines for debate. They might also be formal, like a congressional session with definite

rules and procedures (for specifics, you might refer to, "The a-b-c's of Parliamentary Procedure." Channing L. Bete Co., Inc., current edition). Find out how your committee functions before your first meeting.

V. *Share Your Gifts*

Value your own perspective as a leader. Don't be afraid to share your ideas, concerns and feelings. You have been chosen for a purpose. The other members of your committee want and need your input.

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## Integrating Youth on Committees, Boards and Councils

*"...Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs."* (Luke 18:16 NRSV)

### A Word for the Adults

What a great opportunity you have! Young people have much to offer in the ministry of the church. Youth can bring a fresh perspective, boundless energy and excitement, inquisitive minds and refreshing honesty to the work of committees, boards and councils.

Their experiences in leadership roles within the congregation or synod will shape the way they perceive the church and influence their involvement and commitment to it in years to come. You have a wonderful opportunity to make this expression of the ministry of the church a positive part of these young people's lives.

As you know, the work of committees, boards and councils can be intimidating for a newcomer who must first become familiar with the group's mission, members and manners of doing business. This is especially true for a young newcomer who must face the additional challenge of little or no peer support and/or experience in such leadership positions and roles.

There are several things that you and other experienced members can do to assist youth in overcoming these obstacles and assuming their responsibilities as members of your committee, board or council. Consider these:

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### Five Commandments of Assisting Youth in Adult Settings

I. *Help Youth Feel Welcomed and Comfortable*

Introduce the youth to other members in an informal setting prior to their first meeting. If you have only one youth position, consider adding another to avoid tokenism and to provide peer support. Avoid insider language that newcomers (young or old) might not understand.

II. *Designate a Mentor*

Consider asking an experienced member of your group to serve as a mentor, guide, resource, and advocate for each youth member. This mentor might sit next to the young person(s) and help interpret new terms and ideas for them during the meeting.

III. *Do Not Patronize*

Treat a young person as you would treat any other committee member. Young people need to have the same information, phone calls, notices, opportunities and responsibilities as other members. Never allow youth to feel like "second-class" members by censoring information they receive or lowering your expectations of them.

IV. *Invite Youth Participation*

Some youth are shy, reserved or lacking in self-confidence. Some are vocal, outgoing and self-assured. The simple, direct question, "What do you think?" may be intimidating for one youth, inviting for another. Get to know your youth members well enough to engage them in ways that are comfortable for each of them.

V. *Use and Affirm Their Gifts*

Provide opportunities for young people to serve in specific ways in the work of your committee. Set them up for success, but pick them up when they fall. Give young people frequent reassurance and affirmation for their contributions. Self-doubts about their abilities can surface at any time--encouragement from trusted adults will help them to know that their gifts are welcomed and needed in God's church.

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