

**PRAISE LUTHERAN CHURCH
YOUTH HANDBOOK**

Updated April 9, 2010

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GOVERNANCE

AUTHORITY

First and foremost, as with any other sub-groups within our congregation, the youth group and its leaders will look to Holy Scripture as the ultimate authority governing their policies, activities, and conduct. Where Scripture is not specific, and whereas the youth groups at Praise Lutheran Church fall within and under the congregation as a whole, the youth and the youth board will, of course, adhere to the constitution, by-laws, and direction of Praise Lutheran Church as governed by the voters assembly, church council, and called workers.

YOUTH BOARD

The purpose of the youth board is to facilitate, mentor, and supervise, the youth group as they grow in their relationship to God and also their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Youth board meetings are held monthly on the 3rd Wednesday of each month at 5:30pm. We encourage any adult to attend, as well as any mature youth, who would like to both offer input and serve God's people through volunteering to make the youth program at Praise the very best it can be. Only the Pastoral staff, Professional youth worker, Coordinator, Assistant Coordinator, and Treasurer of the youth board need to be members of Praise. Volunteers can come to the meetings and participate without having to hold office or be members of the church. Only Youth Board officers may vote during meetings. Officers of the youth board include:

- Pastoral staff – A pastor of Praise will be considered an ex-officio member of this special ministry.
- Professional youth worker – This person is to be the main coordinator for all youth activities; organizing and being the primary contact for communication, leading activities, programming, and working closely with pastors to provide direction and vision for the youth. He/she will also:
 - Provide communication to the congregation through various means (including, but not limited to, newsletters, worship bulletin announcements, website, emails, bulletin boards, etc) to keep the youth activities visible and well known to the church members.
 - Attend meetings (such as voters, church council, staff, and other appropriate groups) to work within and through church government to enhance the youth program at Praise.
 - The professional youth worker is also to mentor youth and lead by example through regular participation in church services.
 - Furthermore, it is the goal of the professional youth worker to naturally develop relationships and keep close contact through regular communication and activities with the youth through various appropriate means to assist the youth in remaining close to the church as they grow in their faith and also provide mentoring as the youth face everyday life challenges.
- Coordinator – It is the duty of the coordinator of the youth board to facilitate all youth board meetings, provide agendas for said meetings, and represent the youth as a member of the church council. The Coordinator will not only give reports to the council on behalf of the youth, but will also be responsible for presenting a proposed youth budget to the council. Whereas two signatures are required on all checks written from the youth checking account,

the Coordinator of the youth board, along with the youth board treasurer, shall be authorized to sign checks for youth related expenses.

- Assistant Coordinator – Along with volunteering to assist with various youth group projects, the assistant coordinator should be ready and able to fill in for the coordinator at youth board meetings and report to the church council when needed. Whereas two signatures are required on all checks written from the youth checking account, and the Coordinator of the youth board may not always be available, the Assistant Coordinator of the youth board, along with the youth treasurer, shall be authorized to sign checks for youth related expenses.
- Treasurer – Monthly reports of all accounting shall be given in writing to the youth board and the main treasurer of the church. A yearend report may be requested by the church treasurer or audit committee. If so, the youth board treasurer is to give their full cooperation and provide any and all records and pertinent documents necessary to audit the bookkeeping. Monthly totals of ‘youth savings accounts’ will be provided to the youth along with the last date of any activity in their account. The treasurer should inform any youth that have had inactive or idle accounts for a period of 11 months that they are in danger of having their designated funds in their ‘youth savings account’ closed and transferred to the general youth fund. Treasurer will also balance the checkbook and manage all deposits and expenditures from the youth checking account.
- Secretary – Will keep minutes of monthly meetings and provide copies to the board members in a timely manner.
- Executive fundraising coordinator – This position is to work closely with the Stewardship board at Praise to ensure that youth fundraising is being coordinated with any other congregation efforts to raise money. Furthermore, although this person is not solely responsible for hosting and initiating every fundraiser at Praise, all fundraisers of the youth should be coordinated through them so to avoid duplication of fundraisers and events taking place during the same period of time.

PROFESSIONAL YOUTH WORKER

The professional youth worker at Praise is to primarily report to the Sr. Pastor, but is also responsible to Spiritual Care, Church Council, and the Voters Assembly of Praise Evangelical Lutheran Church as outlined in its constitution and by-laws.

MEMBERSHIP & PARTICIPATION

AGE

There are three youth groups at Praise. They include:

- 3rd – 5th Grades – Although activities for this age group are not as frequent as opportunities for the older grades, we value our youngest members at Praise and find it important that they begin increasing both spiritual development and social interaction among the fellow believers.
- 6th – 8th Grades – This age group also coincides with the three year Confirmation process at Praise. It is here during this time of spiritual growth where individuals begin a more thorough study on Christian doctrine and prepare to both confess their faith publically to the congregation and to participate in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.

- 9th – 12th Grades – As social pressures and crucial life choices are a daily part of every teenagers life, we at Praise recognize that it is now when the church needs to be here the most for our young people. The Senior High youth group meets more frequently and is more intensive for this very reason. It is important that our 9th – 12th graders know that they are not alone. Along with their parents and home family, they have a church family that is here to support, guide, and walk beside them through one of life's most difficult times.

Youth are considered to be in the youth group for a particular grade immediately following the completion of school for the prior grade level. For example, if a student finishes 2nd grade on May 31st, then they are invited and encouraged to attend the youth group and all its activities beginning on June 1st.

MEMBERSHIP

Youth do not need to be members of the congregation to participate and attend the youth group and its activities at Praise. All from the neighborhood are welcome. Our Lord has put Praise here to serve our community. For this reason, we encourage our members to invite friends and neighbors as they enjoy all that our youth program has to offer.

For safety concerns, better communication, and organizational needs, we request that any youth participating in any of our youth activities would have their parents fill out our youth group registration form. A new form should be filled out at the beginning of each school year to ensure all of our information is up to date.

FEES

There is not a fee charged by our church to participate in the youth group at Praise. However, the church does expect that participants will pay their own way for most outside activities, such as restaurant meals, tickets to sporting events, concerts, etc. Of course limited financial help may be able to be arranged if there is an economic need. The church also offers fundraising to help provide means for participating in youth group events off church property. See the section under the 'Financial' heading below.

ACTIVITIES

YOUTH GROUP

Youth are encouraged to set as a goal to come twice weekly to church – once for Sunday worship and Sunday School, and then once for youth group. The schedule varies slightly during the church seasons of Advent and Lent. During these two seasons, in addition to Sunday morning worship and Bible Study, we encourage youth to participate in the mid-week worship services provided by our congregation. Most youth group meetings are held at Praise Lutheran Church and are one hour in length. Commonly the time is split between social time, spiritual growth, and games. Meetings take place on Wednesdays at the following times:

- 3rd – 5th Grades – Meet the 1st Wednesday of each month at 5:30. Most months this age group will also have a scheduled activity that meets off church property.
- 6th – 8th Grades – Meet the 2nd & 4th Wednesday of each month at 5:30. Most months this age group will also have a scheduled activity that meets off church property.

- 9th – 12th Grades – Meet every Wednesday at 7pm. Most months this age group will also have a scheduled activity off church property.

TRANSPORTATION

Although transportation can be provided on occasion for those youth who have needs, transportation should never be assumed. When meeting at the church in advance, parents should never simply drop off youth for events that are being held off church property without first checking with the chaperones in charge to ensure there is ample space available for their children to ride with other drivers. Please take steps to always arrange transportation needs in advance. Unless the church hears differently from parents, it will always be assumed that either the parents are driving their children to the event themselves, or that parents have worked out transportation arrangements with another parent chaperone that will be attending the event.

CHAPERONES

At least one adult chaperone (age 18 minimum) will accompany youth at all activities. Depending on the size of the event and the number of anticipated youth attending, Praise may determine to provide additional chaperones. For overnight events where male youth are housed separately from female youth, both male and female chaperones will be in attendance. For our outings and events, Praise has what we call both ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ chaperones. A primary chaperone is an individual who is assigned to be one of the minimum number of chaperones on hand and who carries a larger weight or responsibility than the secondary chaperones. Primary chaperones may be assigned by either the professional church worker or the majority members of the youth board. If asked to be a primary chaperone, Praise Lutheran Church may offer to cover, either in full or in part, expenses and costs of the outing that are incurred by the primary chaperone. If the primary chaperone desires to be reimbursed for mileage or actual out of pocket expenses, arrangements for repayment should be discussed in advance. Partial or full reimbursement will only take place if provisions are set up ahead of the event. Primary chaperones, before attending an overnight event, should submit to Praise Lutheran Church any and all requested background and criminal record checks. Secondary chaperones are those adult chaperones, such as parents accompanying their children to an event, that are in addition to the minimum number of chaperones required for an event. With the youth director’s approval and consent, any adult may serve as a secondary chaperone. Additional chaperones are always encouraged and welcome to attend. However, Praise cannot provide financial reimbursement for expenses incurred by secondary chaperones.

YOUTH OUTINGS

Normally, at least one additional youth activity or special event per age group will be offered each month. These events are commonly held off church grounds and include but are not limited to such activities as bowling, skating, concerts, hiking, biking, sled riding, swimming, picnics, parties, laser tag, camps, overnights, and youth gatherings.

Youth are always encouraged to invite friends, neighbors, and family members to all of our events. Occasionally, circumstances may lend themselves to those outside the designated age group attending our outings and events. For example, an exception can be made if there is a Junior High event taking place where mom and dad are attending as chaperones with their 3 Jr. High students, and their 9th grade son also

comes along to be with the rest of the family. Our age guidelines for participation in youth events are encouraged to be upheld, but are not so firmly set in place that there cannot be some flexibility.

ANNUAL TRIPS

Annual trips are scheduled for youth on a three year rotation as listed below. Although the following grades are set on a trip schedule, as with the age policy noted above with the youth outings, the policy is not rigid and does contain some room for flexibility.

- 6th grade – This is the main preparation year before students begin traveling with the youth group. It is suggested that the youth begin their fundraising at this time, so that they can be in a better financial position once next year comes and their annual trips begin. It is suggested that students fundraise, at minimum, one year in advance. If the 6th grade youth knows of an upcoming trip, which will take place the summer after they complete their 6th grade year, since by that time they will be in the 7th grade, they may begin planning to attend the 7th grade trip if they so choose.
- 7th – 9th grades – The program is set up so that students will take 3 trips with Praise during this time period.
 - Year A – Mission trip – This is designed to be a domestic mission trip and serve as a way to get acclimated to missions before embarking on the foreign mission trip as a Senior High student. Students will learn about service, sharing their faith, and loving others that are of a different culture, economic climate, and possibly different in race.
 - Year B – Spiritual Growth trip – This trip could take on a lot of different shapes and sizes. Possibilities of trips here might revolve around week long Christian music festivals, youth gatherings, or Christian camps designed to impact the lives of our youth within a specific spiritual theme and focus.
 - Year C – Fun trip – At Praise we recognize that young people build relationships with one another in a slightly different way than adults. For youth, playing and fun time is important for social development and relationship building. And yet, don't think that this trip will be just another day at the amusement park. All of our trips at Praise include elements of Bible Study, focused prayer sessions, and are designed to facilitate an increase of faith in Christ.

Depending on when a student enters 7th grade and what year we are on in the rotation, some youth may take their first trip as a mission trip, where others may have one of the other two styles of trips as their first. No matter, every youth will have the opportunity to cycle through all three types of trips before moving up into the next age group.

- 10th – 12th grades – The program is set up so that students will take 3 trips with Praise during this time period.
 - Year A – Fun trip – Do you enjoy skiing in the Rocky Mountains, white water rafting, or surfing on the coast? Would you like to see Washington DC or New York City? These are just a few of the possibilities that are available for this Sr. High trip that takes place every third year.
 - Year B – Mission trip – This is designed to be a foreign mission trip and to not only serve God's people in other parts of the world, but is also intended to enlighten our Senior High youth as to the tragic conditions that exist in other cultures. These trips never fail to change lives and impact the heart of all who attend.

- Year C – Spiritual Growth trip – This trip is our church’s participation in the National Youth Gathering, which takes place within the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. Here, tens of thousands of youth gather in a large city within the United States and spend a full week devoting themselves to song, service, and devotion to a specific Christian theme. I have heard many times over that this trip completely changes the life of those who participate.

Depending on when a student enters 9th grade and what year we are on in the rotation, some youth may take their first trip as a mission trip, where others may have one of the other two styles of trips as their first. No matter, every youth will have the opportunity to cycle through all three types of trips before graduation from High School.

YOUTH LED SERVICES

We strive to do youth led services four times a year. They usually take place at Praise every time there is a fifth Sunday of the month. Here our young people develop leadership opportunities, public witnessing, corporate prayer, and share the Gospel through use of skits, readings, and participation in the Praise Band. Students will always be guided and led by Praises’ Professional youth worker and be under the supervision of the Pastoral staff.

AWAY COMMUNION POLICY

While on trips and functions that are held outside of the church at Praise, there may be opportunities to partake in Holy Communion. If this sacrament is offered at an LCMS led function, participants who would normally commune at Praise may commune in this instance outside of the church. If participants are unsure about the communion practice at Praise, they should speak with their pastor and the event’s group leader before receiving this holy meal.

FINANCIAL

FUNDRAISER COORDINATORS

There are two types of fundraising positions at Praise. The first is our Executive Fundraising Coordinator – This position is to work closely with the Stewardship board at Praise to ensure that youth fundraising is being coordinated with any other congregation efforts to raise money. Furthermore, although this person is not solely responsible for hosting and initiating every fundraiser at Praise, all fundraisers of the youth should be coordinated through them so to avoid duplication of fundraisers and events taking place during the same period of time.

The second fundraising position is that of a General coordinator. This can be done by more than one person and consist of anyone who may lead a particular fundraiser. This could be the Executive coordinator, or it might be anyone in the congregation that desires to help our young people by coordinating a fundraiser on their behalf. For instance, maybe a parent of one of our youth would like to host a fundraiser and facilitate the process of our young people providing a product or service to the congregation or community. They can be a General Fundraising Coordinator for a particular event or sale. Although anyone can be a fundraising coordinator, they must first receive permission from the Executive Fundraising Coordinator before initiating one. Those desiring to help the youth group by taking charge of a fundraiser should:

1. PERMISSION - Present new ideas and details of a possible fundraiser to the Executive Coordinator, or see the Executive coordinator for existing fundraising ideas that are already in place, but are waiting for someone to step up and take charge before they are carried out. Only proceed once permission is given by the Executive coordinator.
2. SCHEDULING - Always check the master calendar at the church to ensure that timing is optimal and events are not conflicting with other church functions. Write events in pencil on master calendar.
3. ADVERTISING - The deadline for the church newsletter (Praise Pulse) is the 15th of the month. The deadline for submitting announcements in the weekly worship bulletin is Wednesday. General Fundraising Coordinators should make sure details of events are planned far enough in advance to allow opportunity for them to be listed in these two publications, and should take responsibility for submitting the material. The General Coordinator is also encouraged to advertise the event in a variety of other means to make the event as successful as possible.
4. DELEGATION – Some fundraisers or very large events may require the assistance of one or several other assistants. In this case, it will remain the General Coordinator’s responsibility to manage and synchronize the efforts of the volunteers. In this case, the General Coordinator may want to involve themselves in less of the hands on work of the event, and concentrate mainly on administrative efforts and harmonizing the efforts of all the volunteers.
5. FINANCES –
 - a. CAPITOL & POSSIBLE RISK - If there is any financial risk, or need for ‘front money’ to be paid in order to carry out the event, permission needs to be obtained by the parties that will be responsible for paying the bill. If the General Coordinator is willing to take the financial risk/responsibility themselves, or has others that are willing to do the same, then there is no need to obtain special permission. If the General Coordinator expects the youth board to provide the funds, then this must be voted on and approved at one of the monthly meetings before any commitments are made. If the youth board does not have the funds to invest in an event, then the financial risk and/or the request for a congregational loan must be brought to and approved by the church council and possibly, if the event is large enough to exceed council’s financial authority as specified in the constitution, the voters assembly of the congregation.
 - b. CHECK REQUESTS – Receipts must be provided for any reimbursement. Note that purchases should be done with the church’s tax-exempt status in mind. Forms can be obtained from the church office.
 - i. YOUTH BOARD – When appropriate, and where either deposits are made to match the withdrawal, or if prior permission was received, receipts or payment requests should be given to the Youth Board treasurer in writing. Copies of such items should be given to the Executive Coordinator and also the professional youth worker.

- ii. CHURCH BUDGET – When appropriate, and if prior permission was received, receipts or payment requests should be given to the church treasurer. Note that invoices or receipts for reimbursement need to be attached to a special form that the church treasurer uses to manage the Praise accounting.
- c. DEPOSITS –
 - i. CASH – Never leave cash for others without it being attended to at all times. If handing cash to a church treasurer, get a written receipt for the cash. Otherwise, deposit the cash at a bank and obtain a money order, bank check, or write a personal check to Praise Lutheran Church to cover the exact amount of the cash yourself. Then the check can be left unattended for the treasurer to pickup at their convenience at a designated place.
 - ii. CHECKS – Checks should only be made payable to Praise Lutheran Church. Make a copy of all checks on the church copying machine and write a summary of the deposit, including dates, what the money is for, and noting where the money came from.
 - iii. COPIES – Copies of the cash receipt, checks, and deposit summary should be given to both the Executive Coordinator and the Professional youth worker.
- 6. PORTIONING AND DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS – The General Coordinator should, in advance of the fundraiser, advertise to those participating in the fundraiser how the portions of profit will be split. For most fundraisers, 50% of the profit earned by a particular student will be deposited into their ‘youth savings account’ and earmarked for them to use for a spiritual need

YOUTH ACCOUNTS

What we call a youth account is not actually a separate bank account held at a financial institution. Instead, some youth have assigned portions of money which can be spent on their behalf for church or spiritual related items. All this money is kept inside the checking account which belongs to the Youth Board of Praise Lutheran Church. These designated funds are referred to as ‘youth savings accounts.’

All money inside this checking account, although designated for individual youth, is the property of Praise Lutheran Church and does not actually belong to the youth to spend at their discretion. This account only contains money that Praise has agreed to spend on behalf of individual youth where Praise sees appropriate use .

Any individual of the congregation or the youth themselves may make deposits to the youth board at any time on behalf of an individual youth. Normally this will be done through youth fundraising. However, some may choose to make tax-deductible donations to the youth account at any time. As long as no goods or services are received in exchange for the donation, it may be considered tax-deductible.

At any time, youth from the congregation, or their parents, may request that money be taken from their ‘youth savings account’ to be spent on expenses that are church related.

Withdrawals from the accounts must be for spiritual purposes only. Examples of appropriate withdrawals could include, but are not limited to: youth group trips, Youth Gatherings, admission for monthly events, and ticket prices for Christian concerts. Youth or parents of the youth that have funds allocated to them on their behalf may also request that funds in part or in whole be transferred to another youth group member of their choosing.

The Youth Board will not hold designated funds indefinitely that are in the 'youth savings accounts.' Periodically, at the Youth Board meetings, the board will review idle accounts. If an account has been idle for one year or more, and has had no activity, the board shall, after notifying the student, move the money to the general youth group fund and make that money available to be spent on items that will benefit the entire youth group as a whole.

CONGREGATIONAL BUDGET

Each calendar year Praise Lutheran Church sets a budget and allocates money to be spent for youth related expenses. Sometimes the congregation sets aside money for specific youth programs, trips, and events. If so, those who are members of Praise Lutheran Church, or not yet confirmed individuals whose parents or legal guardians are members, will have this money available to them to spend in the manner in which the congregation specifies. Non-members are able to receive the benefits of the budgeted monies that are meant for the entire youth group. However, non-members are not eligible for financial assistance from the general church budget for trips, events and admission fees. For example, if Praise budgets for a youth Christmas party or for a Christian concert, since this generally benefits the group as a whole, no matter how many people attend, then non-members may benefit without having to repay a portion of the expense. However, if Praise has budgeted for individuals to attend a gathering, embark on a mission trip, or supplement a program where individual fees are charged, non-members will not receive a portion of budgeted money for financial assistance. And yet, the youth board of Praise Lutheran Church does reserve the right to make exceptions and distribute congregational financial assistance to non-members under certain situations, especially where financial hardships are recognized and the youth are faithful attendees of (and regular contributors to) the program.