

As Capernaum Ages Supplement



Values

- We believe that our friends with disabilities play an essential role in the church and in their community.
- We desire that our friends be encouraged to serve in the ways in which God has gifted each of them.
- We believe that our friends should be with same age peers.
- We desire that our friends be involved in a faith community that will encourage their growth for the rest of their lives.
- We believe that our friends play an important role in the church and in their community.

History

Young Life since its beginning has always been clear about its mission: loving and reaching adolescents in order to introduce them to Christ through friendship and fun – where they are, in their world. Historically, the age range of students invited to participate in Young Life activities has been high school and then middle school-aged students. Recently, college students have been added to the ministry as the definition of adolescence has changed and broadened. This age range was not intended to limit participation but instead, by having a very specific ministry focus, Young Life is allowed to use its resources to run quality ministries with this particular subset of the population. Ultimately, Young Life's desire has been to reach out to unchurched adolescents, lead them to Jesus, and then encourage them and their families to be integrated into local area churches.

Our goal in creating this document is to help ensure that Capernaum ministries are falling within the ministry scope of Young Life. The missionwide Capernaum leadership team has determined that for Young Life Capernaum, the ministry scope should include students ranging in age from middle school through high school age. WyldLife Capernaum includes middle school-aged students. And those areas that include Beyond Capernaum ministries will be reaching young adults ages 23 to 26.

Goals

Our goal as a missionwide team is that by the fall semester of 2016 all Capernaum ministries will be committed to serving adolescents who are students in middle school through college age. This means that WyldLife Capernaum will be for middle school students, Young Life Capernaum ministries will include students in high school to age 22, and those areas that include Beyond Capernaum ministries will be reaching young adults ages 23 to 26.

New Ministries

1. All NEW Young Life Capernaum ministries will align with the age-range policy. This means all new Capernaum ministries (those started in 2012 or after) will communicate to all parties involved (students, parents, school administrations, committees, staff, volunteers, others) that the age range includes students currently in middle school if starting WyldLife Capernaum or high school for Young Life Capernaum.
2. We have learned over the years that in order to best care for our friends as they age, it works well to minister cooperatively with one or more local churches from the beginning.

Current Ministries

1. Leadership will work with current Capernaum ministries to transition their older friends out of Capernaum and into the local church by the fall of 2016. Ministries like Beyond Capernaum (ages 23 to 26) and other programs or non-profits may be used as helpful places of transition during this period.
2. Any new students (students who have not previously attended club, Campaigners, camp) must be within the appropriate age range of middle school or high school in your area. In other words, effective immediately, Capernaum ministry teams should focus their contact work on students in high schools and middle schools, not adult group homes or adult-age programs.
3. WyldLife and Young Life camps are respectively for middle school and high school-aged students.

Transition

Out of love and compassion for our older Capernaum friends and their families, during this transition period, we are encouraging all of our current staff and volunteers to research organizations, churches, and other ministries in their local areas that currently work with individuals with disabilities aged 22 and older, so that we have options to offer our friends once they age out or graduate from Capernaum.

We are also encouraging staff and volunteers, as needed, to proactively initiate conversations with local churches that do not currently have this type of ministry. Young Life Capernaum wants to serve as a resource to local churches by helping them brainstorm, develop, and be able to create ministries for people with disabilities. We can also refer interested churches to "Joni and Friends" or "Key Ministries" to help them establish a more inclusive environment at their church. These ministries offer excellent resources and consulting services to churches; most are free of charge.

As a missionwide team, we look forward to working with our staff and volunteers as they clarify their callings during this time. We understand and applaud their commitment to the relationships they have built through the years with their friends and the kingdom.

Additional Details for New and Established Capernaum Ministries

Years 1-2:

- Invite a group of people from local churches, some of your current volunteers and committee to pray together with you about this challenge and our desire for our friends and their families to be welcomed, cared for, and invited into mutual community for the rest of their lives
- Identify one or more churches in your area who have, or are excited about having, ministry that includes adults with disabilities.
- Start, or continue, contact work in local high schools.

Years 1-3:

- Invite the youth pastors at those identified churches to bring small groups of their youth to serve at Capernaum club and camp.
- Encourage church members/small groups to serve as leaders or provide dinners.
- Invite church leaders to attend club or camp as adult guests. Brainstorm with them how they might recruit additional volunteers from their church and how your friends and their families might best be invited and welcomed into their church. Create shared activities and events.
- Invite the church to host club.
- As churches are identified and relationships started, each spring (or at after-camp party) graduate friends into that next stage of relationship with the churches.
- Help churches, parents and young people themselves to know that our friends are valuable to their community and that they offer the church new experiences to grow in their relationships with Christ. We want to model the fact that we see value, potential and expect growth in our friends. Remember to use positive, affirming language when describing your friends. This is counter-cultural to most groups of people, but so is the Gospel message. We have the responsibility to bridge our friends to a whole new world of community in Christ that is age appropriate.
- Consider opportunities for our older friends to serve within Young Life. Capernaum has seen doors open over the years encouraging our older friends to participate and serve as junior leaders, leaders, work crew, summer staff and Young Life staff. Participating in work week at Young Life camps has been another way to have our older friends serve with their same-age peers.

Years 3-4:

- Many in the church have not been exposed to the amazing, challenging, wonderful world of our friends with disabilities. Fear of the unknown and awkwardness happens to many people in areas where they have had no experience. Therefore, we may need to offer to form a team to teach a Sunday School class or lead a small group for adults with disabilities at a church in our area to help the church

learn and to be sure that parents are not having to lead this. Invite young adults from the church to join in that class or small group in order to ensure a reverse inclusion experience for your friends.

The Rev. Sue Montgomery, a Presbyterian pastor in Pennsylvania who uses a wheelchair, draws a parallel between “families.” A family affected by disability rarely has any training before encountering disability. They have to respond and learn as they go. Any church that describes or prides itself on being a family can do the same.

Questions to Consider Together

- What stands in the way when your friends consider attending church? Have conversations with people with disabilities and their families to determine if there are architectural hindrances, transportation obstacles, or attitudinal barriers.
- What small step can you help the church take forward?
- Is everyone welcome? Are we willing to change our expectations for what is acceptable behavior during worship time? Can we allow someone to stand, move, or answer rhetorical questions that the pastor asks during the sermon?
- Can everyone participate?
- Are everyone’s gifts being identified and used?
- Are we living life together as a community?

The Good News

There are a number of Young Life Capernaum areas that have already made this transition or are in the process. These staff are enjoying focusing on outreach to middle school and high school friends and enabling them to experience the love of Jesus. The transition has been easier for some areas than for others. In each case, some leaders are now volunteering with the new ministry with their friends at the new location. We are excited about maintaining some lifelong friendships, yet our focus is on outreach with adolescents.

Please know that we are all working on this together; we understand the challenges and the joys. Members of congregations around the country are being affected, as are our friends and their families, as doors are being opened that have been closed or even slammed shut in the past. There seems to be an awakening in many churches to care for people with disabilities and their families on a larger scale. We have even been approached by churches that are desiring to start Capernaum ministries as a way to jump start their ministry with people with disabilities.

Pray! Pray! Pray!

As Young Life Capernaum is growing at a remarkable rate, both domestically and internationally, we know that the needs are great. Let us continue to pray for hearts and hands beyond Young Life to love our friends well. Our desire is to see existing church bodies take on God's heart for the physically and developmentally disabled by ministering in cooperation with Young Life Capernaum. We hope that churches will consider the time-tested, successful model of Young Life Capernaum as a part of their outreach to the special needs community. The potential for Capernaum expansion from there is huge.

Scriptures to Consider

Genesis 1:27, 31: created in God's image

Ephesians 2:10; Matthew 28:19-20; John 3:16: all are called

I Corinthians 12:12; Galatians 3:28; Romans 12:5: many members of one body

I Corinthians 12:4-7: we are incomplete without your gifts

I Corinthians 12:20-22: all are needed

Luke 14:16, 21: intentionally invite

Books That Are Helpful

Disability and the Gospel by Michael S. Beates

Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities by Erik W. Carter

Amplifying Our Witness by Benjamin T. Conner

Same Lake, Different Boat by Stephanie O. Hubach

Gospel Light's Special Needs Smart Pages by Joni and Friends