

A sunburst pattern of yellow and gold rays radiating from the center, set against a light yellow background.

# *Grounding* **ASSET BUILDING IN LUTHERAN FAITH**

An Invitation to Reflection and Dialogue

**AN ASSET-BUILDING  
RESOURCE**

*Revised Edition*

This booklet was developed by Lutheran Brotherhood, now Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, with input from many Lutheran leaders as part of Lutheran Brotherhood's commitment to asset building. Copyright © 2001 by Lutheran Brotherhood, Minneapolis, Minnesota. Revised in 2003 by Search Institute with support from the Thrivent Financial for Lutherans Foundation.

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We would like to hear your thoughts about connecting faith and asset building. Send them to: Randi Griner at [RandiG@search-institute.org](mailto:RandiG@search-institute.org).



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# GROUNDING ASSET BUILDING IN LUTHERAN FAITH

## *An Invitation to Reflection and Dialogue*

What kind of young people do we as Lutherans seek to nurture in families, schools, congregations, camps, and communities? Do we want them to be faithful and faith-filled? Of course. Do we also want them to grow as well-rounded Christians in body, mind, and spirit? Absolutely. We recognize that our faith shapes all aspects of who we are and what we do.

In the past decade, many Lutheran congregations, schools, and other institutions have embraced Search Institute's framework of developmental assets as a helpful tool and perspective for ministry. The research-based asset framework identifies 40 positive factors—opportunities, relationships, and personal qualities—that young people need to grow up healthy, caring, and responsible (see page 3).

Many Lutherans are using the asset framework to strengthen their ministries with children, youth, and families. It has also provided a fresh way to think about our vocations as parents, neighbors, church leaders, and community members. And because the framework is designed to speak to the “common good” in our society, Lutherans are using it to build bridges with people from all walks of life and many different outlooks. They often participate in—or help launch—a local Healthy Communities • Healthy Youth initiative that seeks to get everyone in a community involved in building assets.

As we have learned about the assets, Lutherans have asked how our faith connects with this framework and to an asset-building approach. Two important questions have been raised:

- What in our beliefs and doctrine leads us to build developmental assets for and with young people?
- What unique strengths and perspectives do the Lutheran faith and its institutions bring to asset building?

In the spring of 2001, Lutheran Brotherhood, now Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, convened leaders from The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod for dialogue around these kinds of questions. The goal was to begin developing a more thorough articulation of the connections between our faith and the developmental assets. This booklet builds on insights from this event and invites you to join in the dialogue with other Lutheran asset builders in your own congregation, school, or other Lutheran institutions as well as across the United States. Together, we will discover new insights and wisdom to guide our work with children, youth, and families.

### **Questions for Reflection and Dialogue**

- What experiences have you had in building developmental assets? How did those experiences either challenge or enrich your faith life? How did your faith enrich those experiences?
- What questions do you have about how developmental assets relate to your faith?

# BACKGROUND ON THE 40 DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS

The framework of 40 developmental assets has grown out of extensive research on the positive relationships, experiences, opportunities, and personal qualities that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible. The framework

gives a clear picture of things that are important for helping children and teenagers avoid problems, overcome challenges, and make healthy, positive choices. The 40 assets are organized into eight categories:

## Support

1. Family support
2. Positive family communication
3. Other adult relationships
4. Caring neighborhood
5. Caring school climate
6. Parent involvement in schooling

## Empowerment

7. Community values youth
8. Youth as resources
9. Service to others
10. Safety

## Boundaries and Expectations

11. Family boundaries
12. School boundaries
13. Neighborhood boundaries
14. Adult role models
15. Positive peer influence
16. High expectations

## Constructive Use of Time

17. Creative activities
18. Youth programs
19. Religious community
20. Time at home

## Commitment to Learning

21. Achievement motivation
22. School engagement
23. Homework
24. Bonding to school
25. Reading for pleasure

## Positive Values

26. Caring
27. Equality and social justice
28. Integrity
29. Honesty
30. Responsibility
31. Restraint

## Social Competencies

32. Planning and decision making
33. Interpersonal competence
34. Cultural competence
35. Resistance skills
36. Peaceful conflict resolution

## Positive Identity

37. Personal power
38. Self-esteem
39. Sense of purpose
40. Positive view of personal future

Search Institute surveys of more than 1 million 6th- to 12th-grade youth consistently show that the more assets young people experience, the more likely they are to thrive and make healthy choices, and the less likely they are to engage in a wide range of

high-risk behaviors. In addition, as the next page shows, young people's asset levels are also connected to their involvement in a congregation. For more information about the assets, visit [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org).

# FAITH AND ASSETS

## What We're Learning from Research

In addition to the general ways that levels of developmental assets are linked to general well-being, emerging research shows similar links between young people's asset levels and their faith commitments. As shown below, analysis of data from 217,277 6<sup>th</sup>- to 12<sup>th</sup>-grade public school youth surveyed by Search Institute during 1999–2000 school year uncovers key messages.

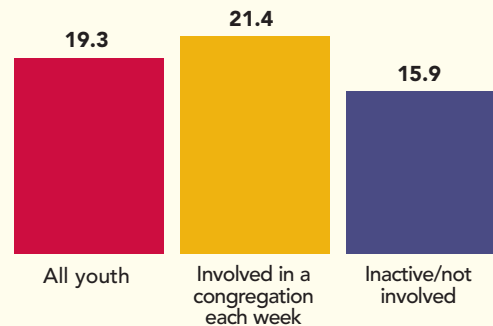
**1. Religious youth typically report having more developmental assets than those who are not religious.** In this sample of young people, those who participate in activities in a religious institution at least one hour per week have, on average, five more assets than those who don't participate. It's likely that some of these additional assets are cultivated or strengthened through their involvement.

**2. Young people who report having more developmental assets are more likely to say that faith or spirituality is important.** Among young people who experience only 1 to 10 of the assets, 9% say that being religious or spiritual is important. Fifty-two percent of those who experience 31 to 40 of the assets believe that being religious or spiritual is “quite” or “extremely” important.

**3. The more assets young people experience, the more likely they are to be active in a congregation.** For many youth, experiencing higher levels of assets seems to go hand in hand with being active in a congregation. And there are some good reasons to believe that they are cultivating some important assets through their congregation, including positive peer influence, restraint, youth programs, and service to others.

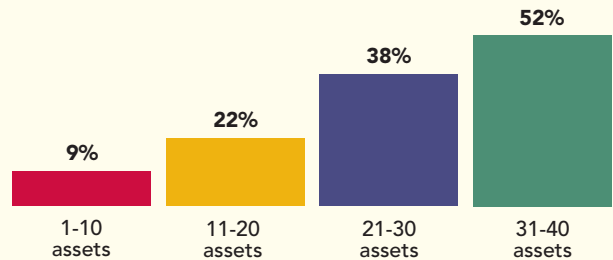
**4. Part of the power of faith and church involvement may be a result of the combination of other developmental assets that are nurtured.** Emerging research suggests that, by themselves, the importance of faith and religious involvement have relatively little direct or unique impact on young people's thriving or risky behaviors. What seems to make a difference is that they experience a combination of many other assets as part of the faith community and their own faith commitment. In other words, part of the potential power of churches and other faith institutions comes through the many developmental assets that are already being nurtured through their ministries with young people.

Average number of assets reported (out of 40)

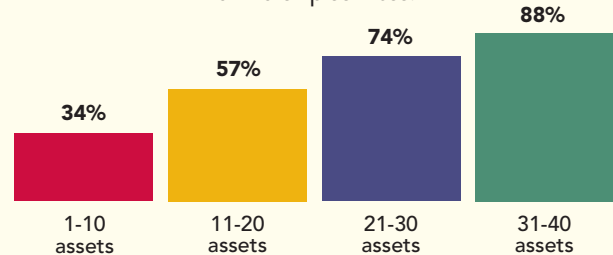


Relationship between assets and religion

**Importance of religion:** The more developmental assets young people experience, the more likely they are to believe that being religious or spiritual is extremely important.



**Religious involvement:** The more developmental assets young people experience, the more likely they are to spend an hour or more each week in religious programs, groups, or worship services.



## Questions for Reflection and Dialogue

- As you review the list of 40 assets, which ones do you believe are directly related to faith and how your congregation, school, or other institution fulfills its mission?
- What do you think would be some of the implications of these four findings for your ministries with children, youth, and families?

## WHY SHOULD LUTHERANS BUILD ASSETS?

*“Indeed, for what purpose do we older folk exist, other than to care for, instruct, and bring up the young?”*

— Martin Luther,

To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany (1524)

As Lutherans, we are motivated to build assets for reasons in addition to “it’s the right thing to do.” Several themes in Lutheran theology direct how we approach asset building.

### Baptism: Gift of Grace

*“He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit . . . so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”*

— Titus 3:5-7

For Lutherans, Baptism lays the foundation for asset building. In Baptism, we acknowledge human sinfulness and we receive by faith the gifts of grace and salvation. We are a new creation, and we claim the gifts of grace, including those reflected in the assets. Some of these gifts include service (asset #9: Service to others), peace (asset #36: Peaceful conflict resolution), hope (asset #40: Positive view of personal future), and the sense of community with each other that undergirds the whole asset framework.

In addition, Baptism places each young person in a community of faith, and the parents and community promise to nurture that child. By reminding us how important that nurturing by community is, the assets offer ways in which all members can make a difference with and for children.

### Sanctification: Growing in Grace

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”*

— 2 Corinthians 5:17

God’s grace frees us to live righteously—not to earn God’s favor, but in response to God’s love. Sanctification speaks to discipleship—the process of growing and maturing in living the faith in our daily lives and relationships. From a Lutheran perspective, asset building can be considered

consistent with the “third use of the Law” (Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article VI) that serves to encourage good works in believers. Asset building fosters discipleship on three levels:

1. The asset framework helps us understand the world young people live in, the challenges they face, and the strengths they need—as they seek to live a Christian life.
2. Asset building focuses on strengths—gifts to be nurtured for and with young people. The asset framework is a tool to help us influence young people’s growth and discipleship.
3. Finally, the asset-building approach reminds us (regardless of our age) of the importance of being positive guides and role models for young people in our families, congregations, and communities.

### Vocation: Living the Gospel

*“I . . . urge you to lead a life worthy of the calling you have received.”*

— Ephesians 4:1

Christ summons all Christians to live in the world as salt and light—not necessarily in sensational ways, but as part of everyday life.

By calling us into our various stations or roles in life (parent, teacher, community leader, friend, employee, neighbor), God works God’s will through us in the world. By emphasizing building assets in all areas of life, the asset-building philosophy provides a unified means for living out our faith by befriending, guiding, and advocating for children and youth.

### Questions for Reflection and Dialogue

- How do the themes of Baptism, sanctification, and vocation enrich or challenge your perspectives on asset building?
- What other Lutheran teachings help guide your asset-building efforts?

# REFLECTING ON THE DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS IN LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE

The Scripture passages on this page can serve as a springboard for reflecting on the potential connections between biblical themes and texts and the individual assets.

Asset	Old Testament	New Testament
<b>Support</b>		
1. Family support	Psalm 103:13-14	Ephesians 5:1-2
2. Positive family communication	Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Proverbs 15:1-4	Ephesians 4:15-16; Ephesians 6:4
3. Other adult relationships	2 Samuel 9:1-13; 2 Kings 2	2 Timothy 1:1-14
4. Caring neighborhood	Leviticus 19:18, 33-34	Mark 12:31-33
5. Caring school climate	Ezekiel 34:11-15	Mark 9:37
6. Parent involvement in schooling	Proverbs 22:6	Luke 2:41-52
<b>Empowerment</b>		
7. Community values youth	Jeremiah 1:5-8	Luke 15:1-10; Matthew 19:13-15
8. Youth as resources	1 Samuel 16	1 Timothy 4:12; Romans 12:4-8
9. Service to others	Isaiah 6	Romans 12:9-13
10. Safety	Psalm 12:6-8	Luke 15:1-7
<b>Boundaries and Expectations</b>		
11. Family boundaries	Exodus 20:12; Proverbs 29:17	Hebrews 12:5-13; Ephesians 6:1-4
12. School boundaries	Proverbs 13:13	Titus 3:1-2
13. Neighborhood boundaries	Leviticus 19:15-18	Ephesians 4:25-28
14. Adult role models	1 Samuel 3	Matthew 1:18-25; Hebrews 11, 13:7
15. Positive peer influence	1 Samuel 20	Philippians 2:1-5
16. High expectations	Exodus 3-4	2 Thessalonians 3:6-13
<b>Constructive Use of Time</b>		
17. Creative activities	Psalm 148-150	Ephesians 5:19-20
18. Youth programs	Ecclesiastes 3:1, 17	2 Corinthians 10:15-18
19. Religious community	Isaiah 35:1-10	Acts 2:46-47
20. Time at home	Ruth 1:16-18	Luke 15:11-32
<b>Commitment to Learning</b>		
21. Achievement motivation	Nehemiah 2:11-18	Hebrews 12:1-2
22. School engagement	Exodus 31:1-5; Psalm 119:33-40	Colossians 3:23-24
23. Homework	Ezra 7:8-10	Luke 19:11-27
24. Bonding to school	Psalm 27:11	Romans 13:1-3
25. Reading for pleasure	Jeremiah 36:1-10	Acts 15:22-35
<b>Positive Values</b>		
26. Caring	2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15	Luke 10:25-37
27. Equality and social justice	Isaiah 42:6-7; Amos 5:24	Luke 16:19-31; Matthew 25:34-36
28. Integrity	Micah 6:8	2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17
29. Honesty	Proverbs 16:13; 24:26	Luke 23:33-43
30. Responsibility	Ezekiel 18:1-9	Luke 16:1-13; Ephesians 4:1-6
31. Restraint	Numbers 25:1-5	1 Thessalonians 4:3
<b>Social Competencies</b>		
32. Planning and decision making	Isaiah 1:1-5	Luke 14:28-33
33. Interpersonal skills	1 Samuel 20:1-17	Galatians 5:13; 1 Timothy 6:18
34. Cultural competence	Isaiah 11:1-10	Romans 15:4-13
35. Resistance skills	Proverbs 28:4-5	1 Corinthians 10:13
36. Peaceful conflict resolution	Isaiah 2:1-5	Matthew 5:9
<b>Positive Identity</b>		
37. Personal power	1 Kings 17:7-16	Romans 12:1-8
38. Self-esteem	Psalm 139:13-14	John 8:31-36
39. Sense of purpose	Isaiah 43:1-7	2 Timothy 4:5-11
40. Positive view of personal future	Jeremiah 29:11-12	Luke 6:20-31

## WHAT STRENGTHS DO LUTHERANS BRING TO ASSET BUILDING?

*“Outwardly there is no great difference between a Christian and any honest man. The activities of a Christian are not sensational. He performs his duty according to his vocation. He takes good care of his family, and is kind and helpful to others.”*

— Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians (1535)*

Martin Luther’s comments on vocation suggest that there may not be much of an outward difference between how Christians and other well-intentioned people build assets. All can develop caring relationships. All can model and encourage responsible behavior. All can promote positive values. All can show young people that they’re valued and valuable. So what’s different about how Lutherans build assets? The difference lies in what motivates us to build assets and the attitudes and beliefs that shape our asset-building efforts. A Lutheran approach to asset building is centered in Jesus Christ. That focus enriches and informs all of our asset-building efforts, as illustrated and explained below.

### Centered in Christ

For Christians, Jesus Christ is the center of life. This truth reminds us that we don’t act on our own. So instead of approaching asset building as something we do out of our own strength, Christians are empowered by the gospel to act as God’s agents or stewards.

### Enriched by God’s Gifts

God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit provides the gifts of faith, such as grace, hope, peace, love, forgiveness, faith, joy, and service (Galatians 5:22-23). These gifts guide how Christians live individually and together.

These gifts can shape how Christians approach asset building. Thus, we begin with the knowledge that God loves and forgives all of us—including young people who face or have made harmful choices. We live in grace, approaching our relationships and tasks with joy and hope, not dread and despair.

### Faith Embodied in Our Lives

God’s gifts ground our identity as Christians. We seek to embody them, with God’s help, in all aspects of our lives.

**Liturgy and worship**—Word and Sacrament are the means of grace that build up the Body of Christ, nourishing and strengthening us for discipleship in all areas of life. Through the spoken word, Baptism, and Communion or Eucharist, God nourishes us to live as faithful disciples in all of our relationships and actions, including those for and with children and youth. Our response through worship and liturgy also offers many opportunities to acknowledge children and youth as gifts to be cherished and nurtured, including young people’s active participation in the liturgy each week. Baptism, Confirmation, and other milestones that celebrate young people’s life journeys can become focal points for reminding all present that we both depend on and have a responsibility for each other as members of the Body of Christ.

**Faith practices**—Faith practices focus on how we live our faith in our everyday lives, both individually and corporately. We express our faith through prayer, service, stewardship, and so on. These practices become central to who we are, expressing our beliefs, priorities, relationships, and identity. Building assets is one way to give concrete expression to many faith practices, as we seek to encourage, mentor, and serve through our relationships with young people—and seek to cultivate these practices in them as well.

Like asset building, faith practices are more likely to be “caught” through relationships and shared experience in community than they are to be “taught” in a classroom. For example, the importance of other adult relationships (asset #3), positive peer influence (asset #15), or honesty (asset #29) are most likely to become part of us when we experience them through our relationships with others.

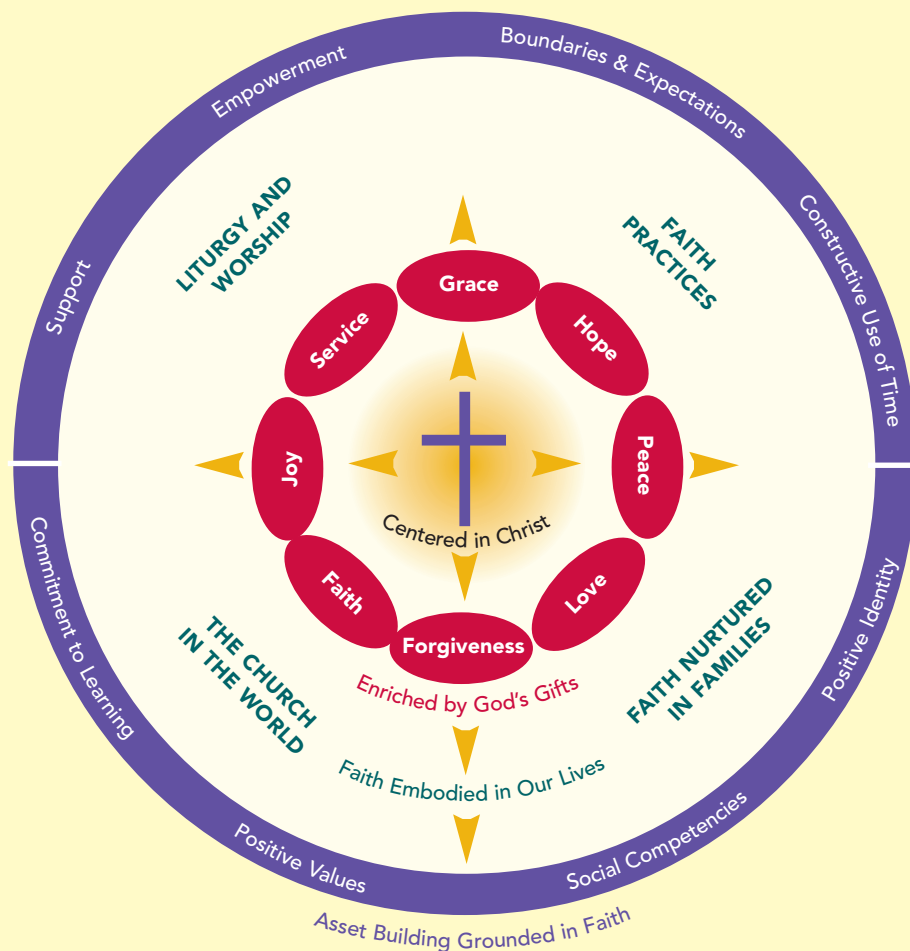
**Faith nurtured in families**—Parents have a primary role in nurturing children’s growth in faith. Parents also have a primary role in building assets. Our faith offers a resource of the gospel and a community for support and guidance. The developmental assets give a valuable perspective on the task of parenting in today’s complex world, helping parents see what they *can* do, not just the challenges.

**The Church in the world**—The Church is embodied and at work in our homes, in the lives of Christians, and in the corporate expressions of the Church locally, nationally, and internationally. Christians are a priesthood of believers, and we are called to speak

the Word and to serve our neighbor (put our faith into practice) in all of our daily relationships and activities.

The asset framework can be a tool for us to use as we seek to minister in today’s world. In this context, asset building is consistent with the “first use of the Law” (Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article VI)—for civic purposes to ensure an orderly and just society. Because the asset framework is nonsectarian, it opens new opportunities to be in community with others, “preaching the gospel” through our actions of service, nurture, and the welcoming of young people as gifts to be treasured and nurtured.

## DIAGRAM: CENTERING ASSET BUILDING IN CHRIST



### Questions for Reflection and Dialogue

- What elements of the diagram resonate with your experiences in building assets? How might you alter it to make it more meaningful to you?
- What “gifts” are most significant in shaping your approach to asset building?
- Select one or two assets, or a category of assets from page 3. How might you approach building those assets differently in light of your faith?

## ASSET BUILDING CENTERED IN FAITH

For some, asset building may be a starting point for relating to and nurturing young people. For Christians, the starting point for asset building and relating to young people is our faith commitment.

**That distinction can have a profound impact on how we approach asset building. Consider:**

- Because of our relationship with God through Christ, we already know the power and centrality of relationships.
- We do not have to shift our thinking from youth as problems to youth as resources; we already recognize them as gifts from God.
- Because we recognize that God created us as whole people in body, mind, and spirit, we seek to nurture all areas of life.
- Because Baptism takes place in a faith community, we know we have a responsibility as members of that community to nurture all young people, not just those in our immediate family.
- Because we understand what can happen “when two or three are gathered,” we do not need to be reminded of the importance of a caring community for young people.

### Assets Aren't Everything

To say that Lutherans are called to build assets for, with, and in young people is not to say that the assets encompass everything that young people need or all that people of faith do. While having more assets will help young people be healthier, we seek to nurture young people who are growing in faith and growing up healthy.

The opportunity for Lutherans is to nurture faith and assets, not one or the other. The two are certainly intertwined, and much of what nurtures faith also helps to build assets, and vice versa. The invitation is to be intentional in doing both.

**Or do we really already know—and live—those things?**

- Do we cram our calendars with so many programs, activities, and to-dos that we don't have time for relationships?
- Do we, too often, approach ministry with children and youth out of fear—fear that they'll leave? that they'll make bad choices? that they won't learn?  
Do we consistently recognize them as fellow members of Christ's body with gifts to offer?
- Do we pay so much attention to nurturing the spirit and the mind that we forget to nurture the body?
- Are we always mindful of our responsibility to nurture young people?
- Last of all, do we truly seek to be community with and for young people, or do we simply focus on providing activities for them? Do we structure our activities and faith practices to include young people?

From a Lutheran perspective, the asset-building approach may be most important not because it's new, but because it gives us a fresh perspective for examining and reclaiming truths that are central to who we are and to our faith. By exploring and tapping the connections between our faith and asset building, we will enrich our ministries with children, youth, families, and communities.

## MORE ASSET-BUILDING RESOURCES



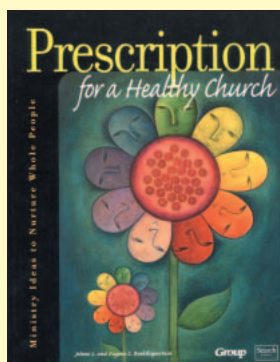
### Asset Building A Foundation for Effective Youth Ministry

This booklet provides an overview of the *Asset-Building Approach* as it applies to youth ministry. Its interactive nature makes it a great tool for learning about the 40 developmental assets, and teaching others about the asset framework. It features the most recent Search Institute data sets, including statistics on religious behavior and attitudes, it defines the eight broad areas of human development and how each asset connects with Biblical passages, what youth have to say about the assets, and ideas for building assets in your congregation.

2002, 8 pages, 8½" x 11", booklet. Published by Church Ad Project.

#207-G03 **packet of 20 \$9.95** ~~★\$15.95~~

Counts as 1 item toward quantity discounts.

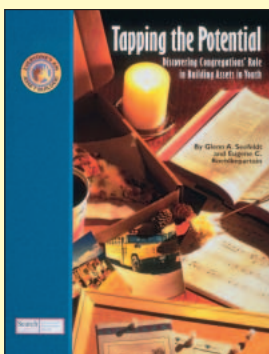


### Prescription for a Healthy Church Ministry Ideas to Nurture Whole People

What makes a youth ministry take off and soar? Does your congregation cherish and support the next generation in a way that's rewarding and fun for everyone? This dynamic book provides a wealth of faith-based ideas, information, and activities for Christian congregations of all types and sizes to help their children grow up healthy, strong, and successful.

2000, 160 pages, 8½" x 11", softcover. Published by Group Books.

#421-G03 \$17.99 ~~★\$28.95~~

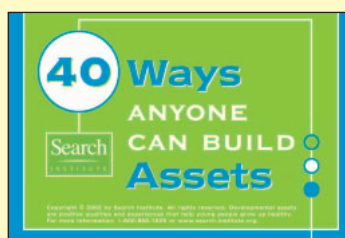


### Tapping the Potential Discovering Congregations' Role in Building Assets in Youth

Congregations have tremendous potential for nurturing developmental assets in youth—potential that is often underutilized. This booklet encourages congregations to rethink their youth programs as well as how youth are integrated into the larger, intergenerational faith community. It also calls congregations to become advocates and catalysts on behalf of all youth in their communities.

1998, 16 pages, 8½" x 11", booklet.

#322-G03 \$3.95 ~~★\$6.00~~



### 40 Ways Anyone Can Build Assets poster

Want to inspire people to build assets? Get them started with this new handout! *40 Ways Anyone Can Build Assets* lists five simple ways to build assets for each of the eight asset categories. Designed for use in any organization, community, school, congregation, youth or family setting, *40 Ways* is sure to spark ideas about how anyone can build assets through everyday actions.

Unfold it and display it as a poster! Folded size: 3¾" x 5½".

Unfolds to a 34" x 5½" poster. 2002, coated paper.

#905-G03 **packet of 20 \$11.95** ~~★\$18.95~~

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