

Our Young People... Our Future and Our Present

By Pam Nolen

The Church of God, International has long recognized the very real need to have our youth engaged as part of the body of Christ. Our young people are important to the future of the church, and they are important to the present. In keeping with this recognition of our young people, we have always had special classes in place at the Feast of Tabernacles geared toward different age groups:

- children (ages 3 to 12),
- teens (ages 13 to 18), and
- young adults (ages 18 to 30).

While these classes have always been consistent with children ages three to twelve, we have found that our teen classes have been inconsistent in what we offer at each Feast site. Our young adult program, *Infuse*, is offered at only a few Feast sites, but has an outreach year-round in their leadership and service projects.

As we have continued to consider the needs of our young people, many discussions have taken place, with a strong emphasis on our teens, as they have been the group with inconsistency of structure within the church.

Among the many early considerations of these discussions was to give a name to the teen program we are trying to build. With our young adult group labeled *Infuse*, it was determined *Ignite* would be an appropriate name, as our hope is to help *ignite* in our teens their passion for God's Word and a burning desire to know Him. Of equal importance is the very real knowledge that our young people can also help *ignite*, or re-*ignite*, that same passion in the long-time members of the body of Christ, knowing the passage of time sometimes lessens our passion as we get older and face the many trials of life.

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity (1 Timothy 4:12, NIV).

In keeping with *Ignite* and *Infuse*, it was also a thought that our children's program should have a name. That group is now our *Sparks*, some of the youngest among us. As we help light the *sparks* in our children, they begin to watch, listen, and question, and they begin to throw off their own *sparks* of knowledge. These precious children are the light that always makes us smile.

Isaiah 54:13: All your children will be taught by the LORD, and great will be their peace.

Matthew 18:2–3: He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

It is a humbling and refreshing experience to see old things “new” through the eyes of our children, of our young people. We have lessons to learn from our young people, and we have many things to teach and share with them. Understanding this, as we gave the names for our teens and children much consideration, we began to lay the groundwork for our teens.

Our first introduction of Ignite was at the Feast of Tabernacles 2015 in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. We had daily teen sessions, patterned after the *Infuse* format. That meant presentations based on a theme chosen by *Infuse*, given in a manner meant to be interactive, inviting participation and discussion. It was a great start; we did it again in 2016, but we need to continue to build on this. We need to offer more, not just at the Feast, but year-round and church wide. We have many thoughts and ideas on how we can grow *Ignite*: a website presence, social media, participation in the *Infuse magazine*, adding teen activities during the Feast, and more. One thing we can all do now and always, when given the opportunity, is talk to our teens. Engage the teens in local worship and fellowship; make them a part of your church family. We not only need to serve our teens, but, by their own admission, they would enjoy opportunities to serve God and His people.

We would ask for your prayers and help as we try to grow our teen program. We have established a committee to share thoughts and ideas, to implement those thoughts and ideas which are doable. The committee is made up of several people committed to creating a lasting program for our teens. We have a variety of age groups represented on the committee as well as in those we seek out for their thoughts and advice. This very much includes seeking the input of our teens, their parents, and guardians. We invite you to share your thoughts with us, and thank you for your help. We hope to keep you updated as we move ahead.

As we consider every one of our youth, we hope to grow in all aspects of our service to them, and in allowing for opportunities in their service to the church.

Sparks...Ignite...Infuse

If you would like to contact us regarding *Ignite*, you may email:

- Murray Palmatier at murraypalmatier@yahoo.ca and
- Pam Nolen at tmnolen@homesc.com

When emailing, please copy us both to your email. We appreciate it very much!