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It's The Thought That Counts: Meaningful ways to show love and appreciation without spending a lot of money.

One of the most rewarding aspects of being involved in youth ministry is showing God's love in practical ways. Giving gifts, the "assumed" method at Christmastime, is just one way to show love and appreciation to your students. Here are some ideas that may connect even better.

Words.

Whether written or spoken, words are food to the soul. Write handwritten letters to your students. Create "Affirmation Awards" (such as "Mr. Selfless," "Miss Rock Solid," "Miss Humble," or "Mr. Fearless") and present them at a youth meeting. Have your volunteers write out a "What We Love About Billy (or whomever)" letter or poster. Anything that is spoken or written that will communicate clearly of your love and God's care for your students will have a long lasting impact.

Time. Recently, I took three of our high school guys to a movie and then to the Krispy Kreme downtown. They had more fun that Friday night than they would have if they'd done something else with their friends. Bring students a free lunch from their favorite restaurant. Attend one of their performances. Bring them along on a service project. Take them out for dessert after a youth meeting. Play disc golf, or regular golf, together. Everyone craves to have another person pay rapt attention to him or her!

Service. Consider doing one of their chores for them, washing a student's car, teaching them a skill, helping them find a job, making dinner for them and their family, rebounding for them as they practice shooting basketball, or providing tutoring right at exam time at the end of each semester. Jesus showed his love for his disciples by serving them.

Gifts. Know your students and their likes before you spend money on gifts. Some students just don't listen to music, but they read a book a day. Others would read only if their popularity depended on it. There are a number of



great biographies, teen books, novels, or comics (such as "Hero") that will draw any student closer to God. For your Lord of the Rings fan, there are two books ("Finding God in the Lord of the Rings" and "The Gospel

According to Tolkien") for \$10 or less.

There are several great magazines for youth as well. Researchers say the average student listens to about 10,000 hours of music from 7th to 12th grade¹. Find out what music they like and give them a CD by an artist who loves God. This takes time and energy, and that is where interlinc is a big help. (No, I wasn't asked to write that.) If you follow through on any one of these ways to give gifts, your students will know that they are loved. Any attempt will make a difference in the life of a youth. Just try to do something memorable. Let's hope they understand how much God loves them!

¹ Matthew and John Clarke, IAFF Annual Meeting 2002. Illinois Academy of Family Physicians, www.iafp.com/annual_meeting/teensmoke.htm