

# Ministry Minute

## Dads of Young Children Retreat Grand Marais, MN



An ad for Westwood's annual Dads of Young Children Retreat might proclaim:  
*Hike and bike! Hear inspiring stories! Learn from peers! Tap the experts! Share ideas! Relax!*

Those kinds of benefits drew eight dads to the retreat at Jim and Ruthanne Vos' place on Devil's Track Lake near Grand Marais earlier this month. Jim Vos and Pastor Jason Van Hunnik are the founders of the 8-year-old retreat, which is focused on dads of children in sixth grade and younger.

The aim: "Get some perspective," said Kurt Koubal, the father of four -- ages 9, 7, 5, and 3 -- and a participant in this year's retreat. "It's a great time for relaxation, and it is really good community building with a peer group. It allows you to connect at a level you wouldn't normally get just over coffee," said Koubal, who counts on the longer and deeper relationships he develops with other dads. "You can address different questions you wouldn't normally ask," he said.

Vos helped develop the retreat for just those reasons. "It's not a structured or scripted event," he said. "It's about developing relationships in a meaningful way that men might do differently than women." The dads arrive at various times on Friday and enjoy an evening of good food and relaxation. Vos does the cooking. The group spends Saturday in activities of their choice such as games, cards, hikes, cross-country skiing, and even the sauna. Saturday evening is reserved for digging deeper, sharing, insight, and reflection led by Pastor Jason. The content really focuses on the guys' vocation as fathers and husbands.

"One of the key features is that we're all in this together, and we can kind of learn and ask questions and struggle together," Koubal said. "(Pastor) Jason and Jim (Vos) can give us perspective." He appreciates that the group shares both the joys and the struggles of parenting. "We are not all the same age, but we are all in that same period. We can struggle together and rejoice together," Koubal said. "It's comforting."

The longer-term relations formed are of great importance to the success of the retreats. "Westwood is committed to having different entry points for people to build authentic relationships that are based on honesty and real-life journeys and how our faith connects to that. This is one of them," Pastor Jason said. Vos witnesses that success in the monthly men's coffee group and at Sunday services. "When I see these dads looking for each other in church the next week or the next month, then I know we created relationships that matter."

