

Coordinator of Youth Ministry Synod Assembly Report, 2014

"I finished up some of my homework assignment today, leading a discussion on ENCOURAGE with some of my teammates after tennis practice. We had a great discussion while sitting out on the courts. **After the questions about encouragement were over, some of my team mates went on to talk about how they no longer feel encouraged in their faith within their church and youth group *although they want to stay involved*.** We discussed and came up with ways that they can get back into things at church, or in the community. It was really cool to have that experience with them, I hope they got as much out of it as I did!"

- LYO Youth Team Member, reporting on a homework assignment

This year I gave the youth on the Lutheran Youth Organization (LYO) Board homework assignments to do between meetings. They were to have discussions on certain topics with parents and other adults who serve as faith mentors in their lives, and lead small group discussions with middle school and high school youth using the Discipleship Challenge materials. When finished they would report on their experience. They learned a lot by putting into practice what we teach in preparation for synod youth events. So did I. In particular, three things stood out to me:

1. **The ease and willingness of the LYO to do this with their friends at school.** One even wrote, "I told my teammates they couldn't leave practice until we talked about God!"
2. **The willingness of their friends at school to participate in these discussions.** Not a single person was upset they had to "stay after practice" or were asked to be part of faith discussions. Most of the conversations lingered on, like the one quoted above.
3. **The hesitancy the LYO had to lead these conversations at church.** Most often their first reaction was to lead these discussions in public with people they didn't even know believed in God. Wow.

What I hear most often from young people is that they long for deep, real, relevant conversations on faith and life. My fear is that too frequently they experience a vacuum in their congregations for this to happen. Why is that?

In this year's Practice Discipleship series, "Frame," the session "Framing Youth" talks about the creation of adolescence and its impact on ministry. Our culture has developed a framework in which young people are viewed as undeveloped, identity-less, self-centered, consumers. Jeremy Myers from Augsburg College calls this the framework of the "Undeveloped Consumer." Certainly many adolescents have varying degrees of these characteristics. Then again, so do most adults I know. In ministry, when we view adolescents only through this lens, we create a vacuum in which young people are bystanders in their faith journey, not yet ready to live out their faith in a meaningful way. We lower the bar and we sit in wonder when our young people comply.

What if we had a different frame for our young people and our ministries with them? What if our framework saw young people first as **Called, Children of God** who are **Relational** (*valued and connected to entire congregation*) **Agents** (*gifted by God to serve the common good*) ready to live out their faith in this world right now, as they are...and not as who we want them to become? What might that look like?

Undeveloped Consumer	VS	Called Agent
Undeveloped	→	Called
Identity-Less	→	Child of God
Self-Centered	→	Relational
Consumer	→	Agent

Ministry in the Northeastern Minnesota Synod has raised the bar high...and our young people (and adults!) have lived up to and beyond this framework. Here is a glimpse of how this framework has played out this past year in our synod ministries with young people:

LYO Board

- 29 senior high youth heard the call to serve God on the LYO Board.
- They planned and implemented the Middle School Gathering and Cardia Deo (Senior High) Retreat, where they led small group games, large group games, Bible studies, and worship
- LYO youth shared their skills in their home congregations by leading Bible studies, starting servant event groups with their peers, serving on councils, leading city-wide ministry events, and more.

Events

- 926 middle school youth and adults attended the Middle School Gathering, where they learned about the Lord's Prayer. What happens when you let youth explore their faith? "I learned at this gathering too much to write down. I liked the activities, learning new things about the Bible, and God. And new ways to go out and apply everything to my life."
- 213 senior high youth and adults attended Cardia Deo (senior high retreat). Once again youth evaluations consistently said the most meaningful parts were the bible studies (led by the LYO) and the hunger simulation we did as a service learning event. One youth shared, "I have opened a new chapter in my life and faith. I feel more open to reaching out to people." Another said, "We are gathered by God to offer what we have to the world."

Do these sound like undeveloped, identity-less, self-centered, consumers? Hardly. When we see our young people as Called, Children of God, who are Relational Agents ready **right now** to live out their faith in the world, they rise to the occasion in ways we could never imagine.

Thank you for the privilege of walking alongside you in ministry. Every year I learn more. I hope I help you do the same.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Catherine A".

Catherine Anderson
Coordinator of Youth Ministry

Want to learn more?

www.practicediscipleship.org

www.nemnsynod.org/Discipleship