

**Coordinator of Youth Ministry
Bulletin of Reports to the NE MN Synod, 2016**

“In advertising, there is something that creates a deeper bond with the product. Nostalgia. It’s delicate, but potent. In Greek, nostalgia literally means ‘the pain from an old wound.’ It’s a twinge in your heart far more powerful than memory alone. It takes us to a place where we ache to go again.”

- Don Draper in *Mad Men*, Season One, Episode 13, "The Wheel"

Erik Ullestad, chair of the ELCA Youth Ministry Network, shared the quote above during his annual report at the Network’s Extravaganza conference in February. He continued with,

“Nostalgia. It’s delicate, but potent. And I think it’s poisoning the church. A lot of us know this. We live it every time someone says, ‘Remember when our confirmation classes were bigger? Why aren’t they like that anymore?’ Or, ‘Our youth used to love going on trips to Six Flags? Why are you taking them to the Indian Reservation instead?’ Or, ‘I don’t understand why kids are wearing shorts in worship.’

Let me be clear - I’m talking about NOSTALGIA and not TRADITION. I’m a pretty traditional guy. Hymns, organ, lectionary, stained glass, meditation — all that stuff is where I’m at. And those things aren’t doing us harm. In fact, our traditions just might point to a way forward for the church. But nostalgia is poisoning the church. It keeps us looking back instead of forward. It keeps us looking inward instead of outward. It keeps us focused on the perceived successes of yesteryear and yesterdecade and juxtaposing them against the perceived failures of today.” *

Nostalgia is poisoning the church.

Which way are you looking – backward or forward? Inward or outward? Does your heart ache to go back to a place and time in the past...or to go towards a future? Are you listening to the twinge in your heart from a distant memory, or to the living God who is calling us forward to a new way of being?

These questions are important for us to ask of ourselves and of our congregations. They are important questions for children, youth, and family ministry...and for all of our ministries. Anna Madsen, who will be our speaker at the 2016 Synod Assembly, also presented at the Extravaganza and gave “responses” to participant questions at the end of each session. She was clear she didn’t have answers...but did have thoughtful responses to help us wonder together how to move forward. With that in mind, here are some responses I have as I consider the antidote to the poison of nostalgia.

Northeastern Minnesota Synod Journey to the ELCA Youth Gathering

In July 2015, 300 youth and adults from our synod traveled to Lansing, MI for three days of serving, learning, worship and play together before traveling on to the ELCA Youth Gathering in Detroit. Our speaker on the Synod Journey challenged us each night at worship to KNOW the Story...BE the Story...and TELL the Story of Christ’s love in the world. We walked through the history of African Americans at the Charles Wright Museum for African American History, and heard the stories of struggle, hope and calling from young adult African Americans in Detroit.

We served twenty organizations in Lansing and hundreds in Detroit, learning their stories along the way. Main stage speakers and learning experiences at the ELCA Youth Gathering in Detroit reminded us that Jesus is Good News – for us and for the entire world, and challenged us to go out and live that Good News in our lives and communities.

On the bus trip home, youth from Trinity and Zion Lutheran Churches in Milaca started wondering about all the stories and experiences they had. Don't we have the same needs in Milaca? What can we do? From that wondering, they started a vibrant Backpack Ministry where every week they pack weekend meals for the 55% of Milaca youth who rely on additional help in order to have enough food.

Those Milaca youth had spent a year preparing for the Synod Journey through Bible studies, serving, building relationships, and wondering about how their faith connects with their daily life. It would have been easy for them to sit back on the return bus trip and glow in the nostalgia of their experiences. Instead they looked outward to how their experience could serve others.

Lutheran Youth Organization (LYO Board)

Each year, around 25 high school youth commit to serving on the LYO Board. They spend a week at training camp, learning Peer Ministry leadership, Lutheran theology, small and large group leadership skills and planning the NE MN Synod Middle School Gathering and Cardia Deo retreat. These youth are leaders of leaders, and it would be easy for them to focus on what they bring to the table – their leadership skills, engaging personalities, and abundant gifts. But when asked what it means for the LYO to have excellence, one LYO youth responded,

“To have excellence, we must put on meaningful and fun events for youth. To do this, we must be fully committed to Christ and must have deep faith ourselves. We must do our best to deepen our participants' faith in the short time we have.”

For the LYO, there is no time for nostalgia of past events as God continues to call them forward in a tradition of excellence that is committed to following Jesus and serving others.

Middle School Gathering and Cardia Deo

Over 150 senior high youth gathered in March 2015 for the Cardia Deo Retreat, featuring small group Bible studies led by the LYO Board, worship, camp life, and a service learning event to help youth learn the faith practices and how they equip us to follow Jesus in our everyday lives. Another 900 middle school youth and their adult leaders gathered in November for large group assemblies with a keynote speaker, breakout learning sessions with the LYO Board, worship, hotel life and more.

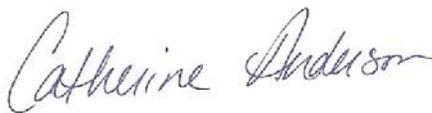
It would be easy for youth to let these become nostalgic events, where they remember the fun and friends but never let it make a transformational impact in their lives. Yet at breakfast one morning at the Middle School Gathering, this happened: A pastor found one of his girls who is often left out, sitting alone at a table in the crowded dining room. He was working on finding other youth to sit with her when he noticed a group of three boys from a different congregation at a nearby table whispering to each other, “Should we do it? Yeah, we should.” They picked up their plates and glasses, and moved to go sit with this girl they didn't know, leaving her in tears of gratitude that someone noticed she was alone and cared enough to reach out to her. The night before, our speaker had shared how we are called to reach beyond ourselves to be the love of Christ in the world. To be people of faith who look outward, not inward.

These are just some of the stories that happen throughout our synod to keep nostalgia from poisoning the church. There are many more stories. I think of our outdoor ministry sites, where it

would be so easy to get swallowed by nostalgia as we remember emotional campfires, late night cabin talks with that quirky counselor, and stories that remind us of our youth. Yet our outdoor ministry sites are constantly asking how God is calling them to form faith and leadership in new ways. They are doing it with new programs that focus on leadership development for all ages, innovative grants to invite new campers to experience God at camp, bringing camp to your congregation, and so many more ways. I think of our synod congregations where you hold onto the strong Lutheran traditions of faith formation and leadership development through Sunday school, confirmation, youth group and mission events...yet offer these in new ways that meet the needs of this generation and culture. Congregations that see how difficult it is for children of divorced families to come to Sunday school and worship on a regular basis, so offer a thriving Wednesday school. Congregations who see their youth as leaders and involve them in every aspect of congregational life. Congregations who pay attention to research that clearly shows parents as the primary influence in passing on faith, so make the bold shift to equip parents for sharing faith with their children by requiring parental involvement in confirmation and other formative activities.

Nostalgia may be poisoning the church. But we have an antidote for this poison. We have a living God who is calling us forward within our traditions into a new way of being. A new way of being Sunday school. A new way of being confirmation. A new way of being youth group. A new way of being church. All so we can share the never changing love of Christ with a new generation.

Thank you for your partnership as we follow Jesus together into this new way of being!
Catherine Anderson



Coordinator of Youth Ministry

**You can read Erik's full report to the Network at <http://ow.ly/Ydn3m>*

Tools for your Toolbox

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www.nemnsynod.org/Discipleship
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