



## Study Guide 4: **STORY OF ADOLESCENCE**

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The story of adolescence is complex. Youth are developing cognitively, emotionally, and socially in ways that impact how they hear, interpret, and live out God's story. Youth have abundant gifts, energy and passions. The presence of caring and faith-filled adults is vital in helping youth explore and live out their unique God story during this time of transition and growth.

### Introduction

Who are youth today? Our ministry to young people can benefit when we take a closer look at adolescent demographics:

- **Country:** According to the 2012 Census, youth aged 10-19 make up about 13.5% of the population. That's 1 in every 8 people.
- **Church:** As of 2008, just over 4% of ELCA members are between the ages of 15-19. No data was collected for ages 10-14, but assuming it is about the same as older teens (4%), that's about 1 in 12 ELCA members, which shows that our numbers as a church body do not match the US data.
- **Community:** You can find demographics for your community at <http://quickfacts.census.gov>.
- **Congregation:** You can find demographics for your congregation at [www.elca.org/findacongregation](http://www.elca.org/findacongregation). (Click on "Full Trend Report")

These demographics give us a big picture view of what it's like to be an adolescent in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America.

- What data did you find most surprising, revealing, or compelling?
- How does the data compare to your experience of youth in your congregation?

### Know the Story

Read 1 Samuel 3 (*The LORD calls Samuel*)

- Scholars estimate that God called Samuel when he was about 12, an age when he had newly emerging cognitive capabilities. What amazing things have you seen 12-year-olds do?
- Many times when we read this story, we stop before the verses about Samuel delivering a prophetic and difficult message to Eli. Have you ever witnessed youth delivering a prophetic and difficult message? What was that like?
- Are there things you believe youth are uniquely able to do in the life of your congregation that they could not do as children—or as adults? How can you make room for them to do these things?

### Be the Story

Youth enter the adolescent time of transition and growth from a variety of childhood experiences with faith. Some youth are novices and new to Bible stories. (*Uh, what's a Bible?*) Some youth view the Bible as a strict rulebook that must be followed. (*Because the Bible tells me so.*) Other

youth had an engaging, multi-sensory learning experience from themed snacks to creative skits to science projects. (*Best. Adventure. Ever.*)

- What other types of childhood experiences with the Bible might youth in your congregation have had before entering confirmation?
- In three words, describe the children's ministry in your congregation.
- Share your general perception of the level of biblical literacy that youth have as they begin confirmation.

No matter what kinds of experiences youth had with the Bible as children, the way they think about, process, and interpret these stories will change during adolescence. They need to do more than identify main characters, settings, and plot points. Growing in faith doesn't just depend on analyzing Bible stories in more depth. The concept of story can extend further to mean ...

- Stories from the Bible
- Stories of faithful Christians throughout time
- Stories about the Christian church in action
- Stories about the ministries of your congregation

Adults often lament the lack of biblical literacy when youth begin confirmation.

- What kind of literacy do youth show when the concept of story is expanded to include these concepts?

### **Tell the Story**

Instead of wondering about literacy levels and faith in youth we serve, we can deliberately learn about childhood experiences that have shaped their faith. To learn more about their backgrounds and beliefs, use the Faith Formation Interview handout and interview one or more youth in your congregation.

- How do you think your youth would respond if you asked them these questions?
- What questions are missing on this form? Which questions would you drop?
- What do you think you could learn from your youth from interviewing them?

### **Closing Prayer**

God of all ages and of all the ages, you have created us with brains and bodies that change so much in the first years of life. Help us to know those we serve and to learn more about them. Thank you for those who have taught youth your story during their childhood years. Guide us to know how to be open to the unique gifts they can offer. All this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

*(Adapted from the PD2015 Session, "Story of Adolescence" by Dawn Rundaman, Sparkhouse/Augsburg Fortress. For complete curriculum, visit [www.elcaymnet.org/PD2015](http://www.elcaymnet.org/PD2015).)*

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### **Learn More and Further Resources**

Practice Discipleship is leadership development for the sake of faith formation. This dynamic partnership between the ELCA Youth Ministry Network, the ELCA and its Youth Gathering, seminaries and colleges provides leadership development resources for children, youth and family ministry leaders in the church.

[www.practicediscipleship.org](http://www.practicediscipleship.org)