



Youth Ministry Report 2020-2021

This past year has been incredibly challenging for our youth not being able to be together. We started having Zoom gatherings but the youth tired of them very quickly because they were “Zoomed Out”. I was sending cards and notes to our youth to let them know we were thinking of them.

All events were cancelled that we had planned for 2020 - 2021.

Prov. III planned a pilgrimage Trail to Truth for all Sr. High Youth on October of 2021. This event was cancelled in Sept. due to Covid. We are hoping to reschedule this event for Spring of 2022.

Winter of 2019 we started a task force for Sunday School and Youth Leaders throughout the Diocese. We would meet about every other month. The purpose of these zoom gatherings was to help with the challenges we were all facing with our children and youth and not being together each week for class and church. We supported each other and gave ideas how to keep our children and youth on task while we could not continue to be together. It was a great group of leaders who could support one another during the difficult times this past year.

The Diocese of Central PA youth ministry task force welcomed in August 2021, our facilitator The Rev. Alissabeth Newton, Canon for Congregational Development Diocese of Olympia to begin to live into a Shaped by Faith initiative for diocesan youth ministry in the Diocese of Central PA.

Phase I- Conversations with clergy and youth leaders who do not participate in Diocesan Youth Ministry 18 nonparticipating congregations were invited to respond to the following four questions.

12 congregations responded to the following questions:

1. What do you know about Diocesan Youth programming?
2. What do you feel works or doesn't work for you in terms of Diocesan Youth programs and ministry right now?
3. (Adults Only) What do you need to feel more equipped to minister to and with youth in your congregation?
4. What is the biggest barrier for you, in terms of participation in Diocesan Youth events and programming?

Phase II

Interviews are being held with youth in local congregations who are invited to respond to questions of losses and longings. At this time of Diocesan convention, we have completed 12 interviews with young people from 8 different congregations and are in the process of continuing those interviews.

Youth Ministry leaders retreat—led by The Rev. Michael Droege from Vibrant Faith who called us to reflect on what is going on in our ministry with young people. He taught us a common understanding of faith formation that included a focus on youth and their identity development, the role of authority and mission awareness. He also engaged us with three guiding principles of inclusion. As we continue our interviews these guiding principles are helpful.



Learnings so far:

As the task force has interviewed clergy and youth leaders who do not participate in Diocesan Youth Programs and sought further education through trainings with The Rev. Droege a few learnings are emerging that we believe should shape the future of youth ministry in our diocese. They are:

- **A need to equip and resource congregations to disciple their youth, in addition to (or instead of) providing centralized youth programming.** There are myriad reasons why some congregations do not participate in diocesan youth programming. These range from geographical to economic to practical concerns. However, all those interviewed expressed a desire to know more about how to do their ministry, especially how to help congregants connect with youth directly, and include youth in the life of the congregation.
- **Youth ministry is shifting toward intergenerational approaches in places where youth ministry is successful.** Our work with The Rev. Michael Droege, based in his academic research on what has and is happening in mainline youth ministry as well as what is working now, point us toward finding ways to equip congregations to connect intergenerationally with youth and include them more fully in the life of the congregation. This is very different from models that those of us who grew up in youth ministry programs may be familiar with - models that separate youth from adults in order to provide them with a more specialized experience.
- **A need to clarify communications and build trust across the diocese in the diocese as a resource for developing and supporting local congregations in the discipleship of youth.** This theme surfaced throughout interviews and needs further consideration.
- **Our congregations love youth and long for their presence in our communities.** No one interviewed so far was disinterested in youth. Those communities who do not have youth as a part of their communal life expressed longings to include them. This suggests to us that the issue is equipping our congregations to know how to connect, talk with, understand and include youth in the life of the faith community.
- **This will need funding, creativity, and volunteers.**

Next Steps

The task force will continue to data gather, and begin to put together the scaffolding for a plan to move forward based on these learnings. A possible retreat with The Rev. Canon Alissa Newton is being planned for November, with a goal of dreaming a potential structure for moving our Diocesan Youth programming toward a model that specifically works to equip and resource congregations, as well as providing the programming that feeds the youth who participate. We will know more about their experiences as interviews and data collection with this group continues.