

**Greater Milwaukee Synod
Youth and Family Ministry Synod Assembly Report**

May 31-June 2, 2012

Focus Areas & Background

During this year, the Youth and Family Ministry Network focused on three areas: (1) Cross+Generational Ministry; (2) Multi-Cultural Ministry; (3) Education. Please note that Education often overlaps with the other two focus areas. Much of the Youth and Family Ministry done through the Greater Milwaukee Synod is funded by the Bishops' Initiative grant from the Siebert Lutheran Foundation. The goal has been to lift up the next generation of leaders for ministry. Three Youth and Family Ministry Coordinators have tended the Bishops' Initiative Grant: Carol Syse, Geri Mertaugh, and Kate Mattson. Geri Mertaugh ended her term of employment with the Greater Milwaukee Synod in January 2011. Kate Mattson did started in September 2011. We are grateful to the Siebert Lutheran Foundation and the Greater Milwaukee Synod for making Youth and Family Ministry possible on a synodical and congregational level.

1- Cross+Generational Ministry

Greater Milwaukee Synod Cross+Generational Ministry Team

Under the direction of the Synod's Youth and Family Ministry Coordinator a team of youth workers from across the Greater Milwaukee Synod has come together to develop a unifying vision for Cross+Generational Ministry in our synod. The impetus for this vision is education. The vision statement is still in draft form, but the team continues to refine it and has begun working on a strategic plan to implement it.

The Greater Milwaukee Synod Cross+Generational Ministry Team accompanies congregations in cultivating followers of Jesus by:

- ***Engaging*** congregations in Cross+Generational ministry.
- ***Equipping*** leadership with tools, theory, and Lutheran theology for excellence in ministry.
- ***Empowering*** youth and young adults to practice their God-given gifts in service to the Church & the world.

Vibrant Faith Ministry Conference, Our Savior's Lutheran Church, West Bend

In November 2011, Our Savior's Lutheran Church hosted a Vibrant Faith Ministry Conference to teach church leaders the concept of Cross+Generational Ministry and to give leaders tools to live into a different kind of ministry. Amanda Juedes, a 2011 Youth and Family Ministry Certification School graduate, organized and implemented this successful event. Churches from all across the Greater Milwaukee Synod participated including suburban, rural, and urban churches. Since then, our synod has made a priority of teaching church leaders about Cross+Generational Ministry whenever we have the opportunity. The Synod Youth and Family Ministry Coordinator and Certification School graduates have led short versions of the Vibrant Faith Ministry Conference at synod-wide events and have been invited into congregations to educate on this topic. Below is a story from Josh Young, Director of Youth Ministries at Cross of Life Lutheran Church, Brookfield. Josh is also on the synod's Cross+Generational Ministry Team. Josh expounds on the importance of Cross+Generational Ministry education through the Vibrant Faith Ministry Conference.

This was my first time at a Vibrant Faith Conference and I thought it was very

1 Submitted by: Kate Mattson, Synod Youth and Family Ministry Coordinator

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innovative. The whole concept moves you to make a paradigm shift of how we think of ministry today. I liked the fact that they are trying to put the responsibility of faith teaching back into the hands of the family. Vibrant faith also presented some solid statistics and numbers showing the drop out rate of our youth group kids after confirmation and high school. Seeing these numbers creates a sense of urgency for us to pass along the Christian faith and develop programs that empower relationships. The finding that interested me the most was the culture that has been created in the church, where parents are encouraged to drop their kids off while we enhance their faith and then they pick them back up without ever being involved. Overall the conference provided some great observations, theories, and insight. It would be great to see more Pastors getting involved with Vibrant Faith and seeing more of this intergenerational approach to ministry actually be a function of the church.

Invitation to Serve 2012: Practice!

For the second year in a row, Invitation to Serve gathered over a hundred youth, young adults, and adult leaders to learn about God's call. This year our theme was Practice!: Discipleship, Justice, and Peace-Making. From speakers including pastors from the Greater Milwaukee Synod and Chicago, a Spoken Word artist, and musician Rachel Kurtz and from a variety of workshops, participants learned how to be disciples of Christ *now!* Not when they are adults, not when they have a retirement plan in place, not when they're finished with college, but *right now!* This event involved a team of young adults and adults throughout the planning process and during the event. It embodied Cross+Generational Ministry in all stages of development, and it reminded people of all ages that God's call is for everyone all the time, no matter your age.

New Orleans Servant Trip

For five years now, the Greater Milwaukee Synod has supported a Cross+Generational team of servants who travel to New Orleans to help rebuild after Hurricane Katrina. This year the team included college students, young adults out of school, parents, and a 10 year-old boy who joined his mother on the trip. This annual trip is important to our synod for several reasons: it allows young adults to form a Christian community; it allows people of all ages to practice their faith and to develop leadership skills; and it reminds the whole synod that there is much work to be done and much love to give.

National Youth Gathering

The Greater Milwaukee Synod is again sending 650 youth and adults to the National Youth Gathering in New Orleans. Of particular pride for our synod is that we have so many people who are planning aspects of the national event as well as performing on the mainstage at the event: Pr. Chris Marien is Director of the Dome Creative Team; Pr. Steve Jerbi & Tony Acomponado are on the Dome Creative Team & Tony will be speaking on the main stage; two young people Elijah Furquan (All People's) & Eric Hoelzl (Ascension, Waukesha) will be performing on the mainstage; and two of our youth directors Zac Meyer & Josh Young are producing videos for the event. People of different generations are using their God-given gifts to enhance the National Youth Gathering. Not only is the National Youth Gathering Cross+Generational because gifts from different generations are recognized, but also because the groups participating represent youth, young adults, and adults of all ages. As we prepare

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for this national expression of our church, we have gathered people of all ages to train for their time in New Orleans. Our synod has gathered 3 times for pre-gathering events. Hopefully, this preparation will make the time in New Orleans more meaningful.

2- Multicultural Ministry

Freedom School

Six college students from various racial backgrounds, numerous adult volunteer storytellers from all over the Milwaukee area, pastors, youth ministry leaders, parents and other family members encourage and support elementary students to read and experience the world through stories and community service. High-energy songs, prayer, food, fellowship, and God's love embrace these children at a time when they could be alone and out on the street. Elijah Furquan, describes his experience as one of the Freedom School leaders. Elijah is a college student, deacon at All People's Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, and a Spoken Word artist. He is a young adult who is heavily engaged in the three expressions of the Lutheran Church: congregation, synod, and churchwide.

Freedom School is important to [Milwaukee's] Harambee neighborhood around All People's [Lutheran Church] because it provides a safe, fun, and nourishing summer program for underprivileged youth to enjoy. Not to mention it's completely free of charge. As a reading-oriented program, it provides a service, an effective service, that a lot of the kids in the neighborhood can't receive from a weakened school system. Freedom School is just as important to the young adults in leadership because it provides us with roles as leaders and provides us with experience. A lot of places that are "now hiring" expect you to have experience. Some of the youth leaders (Future Servant Leaders Interns) have never had a job before Freedom School. This program gives them that opportunity. For those of us (Servant Leader Interns) most of us are from the same background as the youth we serve. I'm from and still live in the neighborhood. So, with us being role models and living testimonies to breaking stereotypes, Freedom School helps us as well as helps the youth. Freedom School has affected my faith in people and God because so many of our youth go through more than we have, and just them showing the dedication to something better and participating in something that involves an integration of faith into the program shows that there is a bright future for our youth. It also has shown me that youth are in touch with the injustices that happen to them. They know about the budget cuts that happened not only in our schools but nationwide. They don't blindly protest; they have the knowledge and understanding of justice and equality. This is why Freedom School is so important to the community, the leaders, and the youth involved in it.

The Young Adult Leadership Training Program

Rhonda Hill, the Greater Milwaukee Synod's Director of Discipleship, runs this program with the help of adult mentors. It is a program that combines all three of our focus areas: it is Cross+Generational because adult mentors work with youth and young adults; it is multicultural because our recruitment focuses on, but is not limited to, our urban churches; finally, it focuses on educating the youth and young adults about the structure of the Lutheran

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Church and leadership in the Church. In Rhonda's words:

The Young Adult Leadership Training Program is a pathway to the workings and ministry of the ELCA. It is designed to educate and equip young adults about service in the ELCA and help them to understand and strengthen their skills as leaders. This is important to the Lutheran church because it educates young leaders about the workings of the church helping them to see their place in this church. It also strengthens the diversity of the church as we intentionally recruit those from urban congregations. The program gives young adults the opportunity to build their faith and create community with their peers.

3- Education

Youth and Family Ministry Leaders Network Meetings

Each month, youth and family ministry leaders have an opportunity to meet to study God's Word, network, and have mini-continuing education. This fall and winter, our continuing education pieces have focused on prayer, advocating for yourself in the workplace, forgiveness, sex education in the congregation, the theology of games, training for a poverty simulation tool, and learning about campus ministry. Because this networking opportunity only happens once a month, our synod has encouraged clusters of youth workers to meet regularly. This fall, two geographic clusters began meeting to offer support and to collaborate in ministry. Our synod's Cross+Generational Ministry Team will continue to work at getting clusters of youth workers to meet. We will also continue our monthly synodical gathering.

Counseling Seminar with Tiger McCluen

This October, First United Lutheran Church in Sheboygan hosted a counseling seminar for youth and family ministry leaders. Two Youth and Family Ministry Certification School graduates organized the event: Thom Niela and Mary Gorges. A participant of the seminar, Teri Bergendahl writes about the importance of this event and other educational events. Teri is the youth minister at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Hartland. She is also a member of the synod's Cross+Generational Ministry Team.

Last fall, I attended Tiger McCluen's "Counseling 101" workshop in Sheboygan at First United Lutheran Church. An experienced lay leader in children and youth ministry, I had recently begun a new full-time position as a Youth & Family Minister at a small congregation with many young families and youth, and I was most interested in sharpening the few counseling skills I had (which included my instincts, my best judgment and my experience as a mother!). After attending the workshop, I walked away with a renewed confidence, more focused sense of purpose and a few tools in my kit!

Perhaps the most significant "take away" for me was Tiger's statement, "Good intentions are not enough." The emphasis on strategic planning in youth ministry (versus just having a "youth group") resonated so strongly with me, and one of my first initiatives was to begin asking the question within my own congregation, "Why

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am I here/Why are we here?" I revisit this question weekly, and during the past two months, I have invited a team to gather this summer to discuss a vision for Cross+Generational Ministry in our church family.

We were given concrete tools and tips to better equip us as confident leaders. Tiger presented us with authentic scenarios which we could possibly face as youth leaders. We were charged with thinking through the incident, deciding on our response and role playing with others in the group. Although uncomfortable and sometimes difficult, I so appreciated going through the process. Sometimes we failed to appropriately respond through words or actions (or lack thereof). Little did I know that within a month of attending the seminar, I would be tested with one of the scenarios we had discussed. On the drive to the family's home, I remember going through the assessment process Tiger taught us. As we also learned from the workshop, I asked the question later in the dialog, "How can I help you this evening?" Without a doubt, the skills I practiced at the workshop enabled me to have a successful and fruitful outcome with a tenuous situation.

I feel fortunate to be part of a synod which values the important work being done by its youth leaders. But the reality is that youth ministry in today's climate is more challenging than ever. We are being called upon with increasing frequency to advise, counsel, lead, talk to, keep an eye on, understand, minister to, encourage and educate families. As leaders, we need to be equipped with the best tools and practices to be effective members of our congregational ministry teams. We need to better develop and nurture the counseling skill-set of our youth leaders – our good intentions simply won't be enough.

ELCA College Tour

Each October the youth from the Greater Milwaukee Synod and the South Central Synod travel to the Lutheran colleges in Minnesota and Iowa for a taste of liberal arts and Lutheran higher education. Sophomores and juniors in high school and adult leaders are invited to attend the College Tour. In 2011, 20 students from the Greater Milwaukee Synod, 14 students from the South Central Synod, and 5 adults traveled to Augsburg College, Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Olaf College, and Luther College. While at the colleges, they worshiped, met with admissions staff, attended class, explored the dorms and cafeterias, did a service project, and had fun getting to know one another.

Pastor Paul Mittermaier is the coordinator for the Greater Milwaukee Synod. He is in conversation with our Greater Milwaukee Synod about having a spring break trip to visit Carthage College in WI and possibly Valpraiso in IN or Wartburg in IA.

Here are several reactions from the students who participated:

Students should definitely go on this trip because it is such a great experience. You see a different type of school. It's really great to see the religion in school, as well as how

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students interact. The food is also a major plus.

You should definitely go on this trip. Even though you may not go to one of the schools, or they don't have your major, it is still nice to see how smaller colleges work and run, plus it was nice to see the faith in the school. Plus, you eat like a king. Great time, great people, great food.

I would tell a student they should come here because it's something new from other Wisconsin schools and it's cool to see other Midwestern states. The best thing about this trip was seeing all these college students and the cafeteria food.

Summary

Our future plans focus on the vision of the Cross+Generational Ministry Team. As we engage congregations, equip leadership, and empower youth and young adults, we hope to proliferate the Greater Milwaukee Synod with a common language and to encourage congregations to make the paradigm shift to Cross+Generational Ministry. Moving forward, we hope to foster more relationships among youth and family ministry leaders and among youth and young adults who are leading. We are excited by the new vision of the Cross+Generational Team and hopeful for what the next year will bring as we implement a strategic plan.

May God's peace and wisdom be with you,

Kate Mattson

Youth and Family Ministry Coordinator for the Greater Milwaukee ELCA Synod