

It's time to TALK TURKEY . . .

Bishop Duane C. Pederson, Northwest Synod of Wisconsin

I write this on my laptop in the New Orleans airport. I'm coming off of five days at the National Youth Gathering. The whole church has given an incredible gift to 37,000 ELCA youth. This gathering has been filled with worship and service; it has been grounded in Christ, oriented to the neighbor, and rich in Lutheran witness and practice.

As I visit with the teens who have attended, it is clear that they are on a high. They have been swept up by the Spirit because of inspiring worship, because of new relationships with Lutheran youth from around the country, and on account of volunteer service projects in the wider New Orleans community. They have been blessed because this gathering has done a superb job in connecting faith and life. They have learned that their individual relationship with Jesus has a very public expression through witness and service. Yes, they are returning home on a high.

Thousands of youth are now boarding busses and vans, checking in at airports, and traveling home, and I know that the high of the gathering will gradually disappear - back to the humdrum of everyday life, back to ordinary home congregations, back to the real world where the teens are not constantly surrounded by other believers, uplifting music, and experiences designed to inspire and deepen faith. It's not unlike Peter, James, and John who had to return to the flatland after experienced a holy high on the Mount of Transfiguration. Very little of life is lived on mountaintops; most is lived on the plains and too often in the valleys.

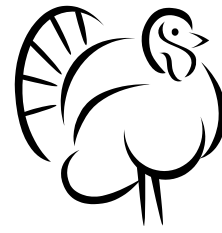
This publication is designed to get us thinking (and acting) on the challenges that lay before us as we answer the question, "How is God calling us to engage our neighbor in this time, in this place?"

I'd like to encourage your congregation to capitalize on the experience that our young people have had in New Orleans. Your church can't replicate a national youth gathering experience, but it can emphasize the faith-life connection that our young people have experienced.

The missional congregation is always connecting faith and life, be it on mountaintops, plains, or valleys. The missional congregation is intentional about taking the spark of faith that the Spirit has ignited within and turning it into a light that shines outwardly to others. The missional congregation is always outwardly bound, not inwardly focused.

Some 700 teenagers from our synod have had an intentional experience of connecting faith and life. The Spirit has ignited and grown their faith, and they lived out that faith through service projects in New Orleans. How can your congregation invite your young people into mission that does the same in your local community? How can your church intentionally pursue a communal life that is outwardly bound, not inwardly focused? Perhaps your teenagers can teach, inspire, and lead your church into mission – in fact, I'm sure they can if you let them!

It would be unfortunate if our teenagers see their local congregation as a club for members instead of disciples sent into the world. What will your youth see when they return into your midst? Will they experience a church which is intentionally bent on being missional? For the sake of Christ's kingdom and the continuing faith development of our teenagers, I pray that the answer is "yes."



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