

2016/2017 Youth Report

2016 Events:

- Convo planning/leadership development (Nov2015)
- Convo Decoration Party (January)
- Convo (high school) (February)
- Great Falls Adult Convo (April)
- Billings Adult Convo (May)
- Annual Conference (June)
- Youth leadership retreat (October)
- Livingston Pop-up Family group (November)
- Convo Planning (November)

2017 Events:

- Convo Decorations (January)
- Convo (February)
- Kalispell Pop-up Family Group (March)
- Livingston Adult Convo (April)
- Jr. High Retreat (April)
- Leadership Team Retreat (May)
- Annual Conference (June-limited youth attending)

Youth Leadership Team Members:

Youth

- Alex Cunningham (12)
- Aly Greer (12)
- Kenny Suazo (12)
- Elle Thompson (12)
- Max Rubino (11)
- Sarah Carbis (11)
- Peyton Baker (10)
- Sealey Raymond (10)
- Parker Sanford (10)
- Carter Davis (9)
- Lizzie Berns (8)
- Zoe Monson (8)
- James Ochs (8)
- Gabriella Weida (8)
- Micah Adams-Griffin (7)
- Ryan Cotnoir (7)
- Kayli Fellman (7)
- Austin Price (7)
- Porter Baker (6)

Adults

- Jason Baker
- Jill Baker
- Nicole Berns
- Meladie Brandle
- Mark Cumming
- Mike Faehnrich
- Mary Kisthart
- Molly Kisthart
- Alison Massey
- Janet Mulroy
- Wendy Ochs (clergy)
- Phaedra Raymond
- Laura Scholl
- Lisa Thompson

Other Clergy Volunteers

- Susan Otey
- Sami Pack
- Dawn Skerritt

What is the Youth Leadership Team?

This team design stems from the Leadership Team structure as presented by Stephen Ross from the Oregon-Idaho Conference, and has been adapted with mixtures of old CCYM structure and other components to meet different needs of our conference and our kids. The mission of the team began as a space to provide more opportunity for youth to do ministry for each other, grow in their own discipleship, and develop skills to encourage and share with others in their churches, communities, and schools. We operate on a call and accountability system, meaning that any who want to step into a role on the team are welcome, but must live in covenant with others and hold themselves accountable for their actions both on and off the team. Almost all of the ideas, staffing, programming, and execution of experiments is done by the youth, with the encouragement, guidance, and support of the adult leaders within the team.

Goals:

We are finishing up our third year of the Youth Leadership Team, and have hit the ground running in the last 9 months of our work. Up to this point, our main goals have been the following:

Previous goals:

- Plan/prepare/staff Convo and Jr. High retreats for conference wide youth
- Provide a place for youth to grow in leadership, discipleship, and relationship within their own faith.
- Honor all ideas and experiments as valued and worth trying. We celebrate our success, and learn from our failures.
- Teach and model skills for youth to take back to their peers and communities, and confidence to share and encourage others on their way.
- Become comfortable with the new team structure, and create a strong presence within our existing youth and churches, with the intention of expanding our reach when able.

As we close out our 16/17 year, we are feeling cohesive, encouraged, and excited. We intend to keep the goals above, while adding in new ideas and conversations for the coming year.

- Elect youth officials (president/vp/etc.) for the YLT, who will work with youth coordinator to plan and run meetings, encourage/explore faith development, and recruit new members.
- Explore deeper faith and discipleship development, by encouraging increased clergy participation and leadership.
- Establish a "self-replacing" system, where graduating or youth leaving the team are encouraged to identify and mentor a new team member before leaving.

Questions:

- How do we encourage kids to be a part of a church that currently has very little to offer them?
 - How do we keep faith and a relationship with God relevant and helpful to young people?
- Where does the church fit into that?

-If the kids are meeting half-way, how can we do our part? Shifting thoughts that youth are placeholders and workers, but not truly a part of the whole church. Move from taking advantage to including and inviting.

Celebrations:

- YLT has doubled its size over 2.5 years, and many who have been a part from the beginning have stepped up into official and unofficial leadership roles within their churches and schools.
- Youth are internalizing the purpose of the team and the standard that is set by the Youth coordinator and their peers.
- Youth are willing to take risks in ministry experiments and see them through, success or failure.
- Youth have created a celebrated presence in many local churches around the conference through Adult Convo, Pop-up Family Groups, and retreats.
- Leadership team adult staff has internalized their roles and live out those roles both on and off the team.
- The culture of call is growing by personal invitation, and carefully discerning both youth and adults who exhibit leadership abilities of all types.

Improvements:

- Declining numbers at Convo retreat (may be just classes of youth graduating and moving up, but something to be aware of). How can we encourage each other to come?
- Focus on leadership development, need to incorporate more faith development. Work through questions like "Why is faith important?" "How is it practical?" "How is it relevant?"
- More direct clergy involvement- to help with above questions.
- Improve commitment requirements- maybe have an official team, and a sub team for those who want to be a part, but are on the edges.
- Work with current young adults to find ways to continue connection after high school.
- Other things I can't think of right now....

Abbie's Ideas/hopes

- Work with local churches and youth leaders on how to better reach kids in a local setting
- Offer a "Sabbath" retreat for youth workers throughout the state.
- Conference Youth Mission trip
- Attend leadership conferences for professional development, as well as send youth to conferences such as NEXT or others.
- Possibly establish a support team of adults/youth who assist in the planning of main youth leadership team events.
- Probably a million others things....

Thoughts from people on the leadership team:

“The leadership team is important to me because it showed me how friends work together, support each other, and accept/love each other for who we are. It’s made a big difference in helping me surround myself with the right people and be the best person I can be!”

-Gabriella Weida, 8th grade, Helena

“Being on the youth leadership team is important to me because it’s a rewarding experience to connect with the youth outside of camp and convo. I started helping Abbie and our local youth group a few years ago and then started counseling camp and convo for the last two years. It has really brought a lot of joy into my life to develop connections and relationships with not just the youth in Great Falls, but around the rest of the state. Being a part of the youth leadership team allows us the opportunity to get together more often throughout the year. The main part that I really enjoy about the team is helping youth to recognize their potential do to amazing things. When we gather to plan convos or retreats or pop up groups, or anything else, it’s the youth that take the lead. As an adult member of the team I feel I’m there to provide some guidance and support for them. I feel it’s my job to empower the youth, and let them know that they are loved and supported in their ideas and their vision.

-Jason Baker, Adult leader, Great Falls

"What's a Convo?" It's a time to be together to celebrate life as God's people and to share deeply in what that means in our own lives. We sang upbeat songs, played some goofy games, had time in small, intergenerational "family groups" to explore and discuss what being Christians is challenging, confusing, inspiring us, and to hear other's experiences. We had large group sessions where we heard the Youth give very inspiring heartfelt talks about their faith journeys. There was time for small group meditation/crafts/relaxation and a period for visiting several prayer stations. Of course we were well fed at lunch, dinner, and several snack and coffee breaks. It was a full, varied day. "Why would an adult want to go to Adult Convo?" To be renewed, refreshed, and revitalized in your faith journey. To be free of the responsibilities for planning, setting up, arranging helpers, the tedious part of church which saps my energy. To hear what the Youth have to say and to be inspired by the depth of their beliefs and their energy. Because it was fun.

If you get invited to go to Adult Convo, be sure to go.

-Marilyn Sheffels, Great Falls

“Kids today”, is a statement that you hear often. I respond, “yes, they are wonderful!” Being an adult leader for the YLT has reinforced my knowledge that youth grow in their love of the church and themselves with their participation with YLT. The youth involved on the team actually take responsibility for planning, leading, and self awareness. I’ve seen so much good, kindness, and true unconditional love with the Team of youth and adults. My spirituality is enriched with sharing in leadership with they YLT.

-Mary Kisthart, Adult leader, Livingston