iasym | INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF YOUTH MINISTRY

THINKING THEOLOGICALLY ABOUT YOUTH MINISTRY IN TIMES OF UPHEAVAL

Four time zones: Asia/Australia, Africa/Europe, America, and International

Time schedule and Zoom links are on www.iasym.net/online

ABSTRACTS

RONALD BELSTERLING, BUILDING SECURE RELATIONSHIPS WITH TEENS IN INSECURE TIMES

ABSTRACT/INTRODUCTION- YOUTH MINISTRY DURING STRESSFUL SEASONS

We all know that this past year has been one of the most difficult years in memory for anyone in the business of relationship. Youth workers all over the world had to adjust their approaches and recreate all efforts at building relationships technologically. While our skills have grown in this way, and workers pulled some kind of ministry together, many youth still do suffer from the effects of imposed relational vacuums. Many represent the statistical climb in depression, drug & porn use, loneliness, suicide, etc. How are some youth buffered? And others not? It is imperative on us who work with teenagers to use the time that we have with teens as proficiently as possible. How do we know that another Pandemic isn't around the corner? As we are beginning to return to some ways of normal interactions, we can't afford sloppy efforts to fill in the gaps. Building relationships have to be approached with precision, care, and urgency. Utilizing ARM (Attachment Relationship Ministry) enables all youth workers to do that well.

QUESTIONS ALL YOUTH LEADERS ASK

-Why do our best relational efforts in youth ministry sometimes fail and our worst sometimes succeed?
-How do we know how to minister to whom and when?
-How do I welcome LGBTQIA teens successfully without alienating anyone?
-What do we do with teens who suffocate us with their clinginess?
-Why does a teen who seems to like the youth workers never show up at youth centers or at church?
-Why does a teen who complains about everything participate in almost everything?
-What does one say to a mother who demands her child receive more attention?
-How does one advise a father who admits disconnect between he and his child?
-What does one say to an angry parent, wanting to know why we're talking about sex with his/her child?
-Can I truly represent God to youth and aid them if I struggle with depression, pornographic temptation, or sexual identity issues?

THE PRIMARY NEEDS OF HUMAN BEINGS DO NOT CHANGE

Talking more about relational ministry does not mean that competent relational ministry occurs more today than it did years ago. Just "being with" young people does not cultivate relational growth or blessing. This past year showed us, we have to use our time wisely. And our relationships with young people ought also to never be our primary goal(s). Many folks echo Jim Rayburn's ideas (Relationship over Religion) and successfully reach young people; however, many echo Rayburn's ideas, but fail to deliver—past and present. They fail for several reasons—all of which can be explained through the ARM lens. We represent God's and parental-like love to teenagers.

THE FOUNDATIONAL GIFT OF RELATIONSHIP

When God created humanity, He provided us with two gifts. God gave people life and life within relational context. People enjoyed those gifts for a short time, but through and with Adam, humans rejected the gift of the relational context and walked away from relationship with God and the mediating influence of that relationship on all others. *God sent Jesus to humanity to reestablish an opportunity for relationship.* Those who gratefully acknowledge Christ as God's Son and the Savior of all find a reconnected relationship with God. Youth Workers imitate Jesus' ministry methods in multiple ways.

THREE PRIMARY RELATIONAL POSSIBILITIES FOR ALL CHRISTIANS

First, there is one's relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Second, there is relationship with others within Jesus Christ. Third, there is relationship with others on behalf of Jesus Christ. *The first vertical column of Figure 1 represents ministry within the body of Christ; a youth leader facilitates individual and communal growth of teens who know Christ so as to live the love of Christ. The second vertical column represents ministry on behalf of Jesus Christ; the youth leader and those in a youth group who know Christ reach out to those who don't, showing them the love of Christ, both verbally and nonverbally.*

Attachment Relationship Ministry model (ARM)		
Basic Relational Needs and Positions of All Teens:	*Secure with God (SG)* *(Within Christ Relationships)*	*Insecure with God (IG)* *(On behalf of Christ Relationships)*
Secure with Parents (SP)	*Essentially Secure (SGSP)*	*Relationally Secure (IGSP)* *Spiritually Insecure*
Insecure with Parents (IP)	*Spiritually Secure (SGIP)* *Relationally Insecure*	*Essentially Insecure (IGIP)*
Figure 1: SPSG (Secure relationship with Parents and with God); SPIG (Secure relationship with Parents and Insecure with God); SGIP (Secure relationship with God and Insecure with Parents); IPIG (Insecure relationship with God and with Parents). We must intentionally minister somewhat differently to those who have different deeper level relational needs and behavioral maladjustments.		

TWO PRIMARY DISPLAY TYPES OF TEEN INSECURITY

Insecure Youth show up in 3 out of the 4 boxes. Within each insecure box, there will be two possible emotional approaches: Insecure Avoidant (distant, cautious) or Insecure Anxious (clingy and/or agitating). For the most part, since the IGSP youth essentially have an intellectual issue, and a basic ability to trust, the youth worker may not notice either the fight or flight syndrome in them, but instead a simple pragmatic disbelief in God.

Attachment Based Profiles of Teenagers		
Personality Profiles	*Secure-Attachment with God*	*Insecure-Attachment with God*
Secure Attachment with Parents	*(SGSP) As stable as a teen can be. Naïve-generous with trust. Many living on the extreme of either "on fire" or "bored/going through the motions."*	*(IGSP) Interest in God is likely complacent (agnostic- just doesn't care) or skeptical;* *Physically, Socially and Emotionally-essentially content.*

Insecure-Attachment with Parents	(SGIP) Trust in God is intellectually volitional more than emotionally stable. With ambivalent youth, this manifests in relationship with YW as extremely clingy and/or critical. With avoidant youth, this manifests in relationship with YW as unavailable or distant.	(IGIP) Extreme Internalization (quiet/avoiding-the potential cutter/SI) or Externalization (potentially agitating, rude, bitter, or loud/attention seeking). Primary difference from SGIP is no spiritual assent to God. Those raised in the church are typically more difficult to work with.
Figure 2: Adolescent Profiles- Outliers always exist. Also, some adolescents are in transitions as well. For example many 14-15 yr. old SPIGs may be in an essentially trusting relationship with God, though not ever having "accepted Christ as Savior" because they've just never thought deeply about God.		

ASIA / AUSTRALIA Session A2

MONTAGUE WILLIAMS, CHURCH IN COLOR: YOUTH, RACE, AND THE THEOLOGY OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR

This session reflect on the publication and contributions of Montague R. Williams' *Church in Color: Youth Ministry, Race, and the Theology of Martin Luther King Jr.* (Baylor University Press, 2020). The past year has seen renewed attention to racial injustices with young people among the leading voices calling for change. What might this mean for Christian youth ministry? *Church in Color* offers a practical theological exploration of race in three distinct multiracial and multiethnic congregational youth ministries in the United States. Bringing together the work of ecclesial ethnography, social analysis, and nuanced engagement of Martin Luther King Jr.'s theological ethics, this book guides congregations to embrace a discipleship that recognizes, remembers, and wrestles with the realities of race, racism, and racial identity.

ASIA / AUSTRALIA Session B1

IVAN CHRISTIAN, YOUNG PEOPLE'S EMBODIED HOPE IN PANDEMIC THREATS: A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON NETFLIX'S PANDEMIC DOCUSERIES

Abstract
Young people today are both likely to bear the brunt of the long-term problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and face other kinds of outbreaks or pandemics in the future. In that kind of unprecedented situation, the world offers us hope to recover from today's pandemic and to prevent other outbreaks or pandemics in the future. This study will focus on a theological reflection on hope concerning pandemic threats offered in popular culture. Specifically, using the revised correlational method, this study will explore how the theological reflection on the concept of hope in Netflix's Pandemic docuseries could help young people to live with an embodied hope in a pandemic threat. This theological reflection will offer embodied hope as a theological perspective for young people to embody their limitations as embodied beings while enacting their eschatological hope in pandemic threats.

Len Kageler, Mike Severe, and Faith Argeropolis, Burnout among Christian Youth Workers: A Cross National Analysis

Len Kageler, Ph.D. Nyack College, Nyack, New York
Mike Severe, Ph.D. Taylor University, Upland, Indiana
Faith Argeropolis, B.S. Nyack College, Nyack, New York

Abstract

The subject of burnout has received a great deal of popular and academic attention, as the issue is a common problem and experience in both the United States and United Kingdom context. This paper, after a representative literature review, presents and discusses findings about burnout among Christian youth workers. Youth workers (n=123) in the US and the UK were surveyed (2020) on youth ministry burnout.. Causes of burnout, recovery and prevention are discussed. This research will be of interest not only to youth ministry practitioners, but also denominational leaders and youth ministry educators.

Shantelle Weber, Astrid Sandsmark, Sarah Holmes, and Ronelle Sonnenberg, Reflections on Ministry amongst children during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Abstract

The role and function of children's ministry during the first six months of the covid-19 pandemic is explored, including a comparison of observations from four different contexts. Theological reflection examines the emerging ecclesiologies, form and adaptation of sacramental practices and pastoral care of families during this time of crisis. This investigation acknowledges awareness that there were significant restrictions and consequent challenges facing churches during this time, causing implications on children's ministry that were unprecedented and frustrating for the Church on a global scale. Observations and recommendations are presented to aid churches globally in ensuring that children's ministry during such times of crisis is child-centred, values the child as part of the body of Christ, fosters intergenerational role modelling and solidarity, and helps rather than hinders children on their spiritual journey.

Key words:

Children's ministry, international perspectives, covid-19, crisis, church

ROBIN BARFIELD, THE LIMINAL CHILD: AGENCY AND POTENTIAL IN DIALOGUE

The Liminal Child:

Agency and Potential in Dialogue

Abstract: Traditional approaches to theologies of childhood have focused on Piagetian systems of child development which has led to an emphasis on what the child will be, the potential adult. These have depended on realistic understandings of time and eternity. In response to this, following the theologies of Schleiermacher and Rahner, the agency of the child-as-she-is has been the sole focus of attention. These have idealist views of time and eternity. As a way through the impasse an analogy will be considered of buying clothes for a child to grow into and clothes that they will grow out of. Using a modified understanding of James Loder's theory of child theology and a Biblical Theology of the now and the not yet, this twin dynamic will be considered and a way forward suggested.

SCOTT PAGET, ORIENTATION, DISLOCATION AND DWELLING

The effects and response to the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic has varied internationally. The UK Government, together with the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, issued a joint response, instructing all citizens to lockdown. People had to stay home and limit physical contact with those who are not living in a household with us. This displacement of the everyday norms and assumptions encouraged citizens to turn from the provincial to the parochial. It encouraged people to dwell where they were.

This paper will reflect on the early results of a small scale academic project which is engaging with youth ministry practitioners in one geographically defined, semi-rural presbytery within Scotland. Through the use of deep mapping, the project is attempting to see the everyday geography of youth ministry. The paper will briefly look at some underlying theories about space, time and place, before looking at participants maps of their practice, to consider what is revealed initially by these artefacts.

Indicative Bibliography
Bergmann, Sigurd. 2014. Religion, space, and the environment. Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
Bodenhamer, David J., John Corrigan, and Trevor M. Harris. 2015. Deep maps and spatial narratives. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Davey, Andrew. 2007. "Faithful Cities: Locating Everyday Faithfulness." Contact 152 (1):8-20. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/13520806.2007.11759063.
Farrugia, David. 2018. Spaces of youth : work, citizenship and culture in a global context. London: Routledge.

Rae, Murray. 2017. Architecture and theology : the art of place. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press.

Skelton, Tracey, and Gill Valentine, eds. 1998. Cool places : geographies of youth cultures. London: Routledge.

Stump, Roger W. 2008. The geography of religion : faith, place, and space. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Sullivan, Rob. 2017. The Geography of the Everyday: Toward an Understanding of the Given. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.

AFRICA / EUROPE Session B1

BERT ROEBBEN, AGNOSTICISM AS BREAKOUT ROOM. THEOLOGIZING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN THEIR SEARCH FOR MEANING, IDENTITY AND SPIRITUALITY

In this paper the focus will be on the concepts of "theologizing with youth" in the German speaking world and on "youth spirituality" in the Anglo-Saxon world – the first having a more explicit theological and pedagogical, the latter a more secular and pre-reflective connotation. Both concepts do not need to exclude but can include each other in youth ministry. This is especially the case when doubt, uncertainty and contingency are at stake in the lives of young people. In this paper I discuss the meaning of a healthy agnosticism as a sort of "breakout room" in theologizing with youth. Agnosticism is considered to be a typical feature of the spiritual and religious development of the adolescent. I examine how the basic attitude of questioning can be honored in youth theology in an anthropologically critical and theologically relevant way and how it can be articulated in youth work. Implications of this approach with respect to the credibility of faith communities in their work with young people are discussed at the end of the paper.

AFRICA / EUROPE Session B2

ANTHONY MIFSUD, SPIRITUALITY & POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AMONGST MALTESE GENERATION Z

Political participation is not a standalone, but at the root of it, are lifestyles, family backgrounds and values to mention a few. Faith practice and spirituality "may foster an integrated moral and civic identity within a young person and lead the individual along a path to becoming an adult contributing integratively to self, family, community, and civil society." (Lerner et al, 61) This study wants to investigate the links if any, between faith practice/spirituality as well as other motivations, with political participation of youths.

Reports from European parliament indicate increased participation of Generation Z (+14pp) and also an increased trust in political participation among young people(European Parliament, 2019). On the other hand other studies report a certain dissatisfaction in meaningful political participation (Kwon, 2018). Young people forming their identity, in a country which has introduced voting at both European & local levels at 16, stand in this tension.

In this quantitative study amongst 400 young people, the following was investigated: The impact of faith and spirituality on day to day choices; the values at the root of their political choices and the impact of the context on this political participation as intended by Positive Youth Development theories (including political parties, family & education). The research was held as a follow-up of the European Parliament/Local Council Elections in 2019.

The study will explore what influences the political participation of young people aged 16-25, in the context of their educational, familiar, societal & spiritual backgrounds.

Agenzija Zghazagh, (2019); *Mirrors and Windows 2: Maltese Young People's Perceptions, Experiences and Expectations of Education, Employment and Lifestyles*; Valletta: Malta

Benson, P. L. (1997). Spirituality and the adolescent journey. Reclaiming Children and Youth, 5(4), 206–209.

European Parliament, (2019) https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2019/postelection-survey-2019-complete-results/report/en-post-election-survey-2019-report.pdf

Lerner, R. M., Alberts, A. E., Anderson, P. M., & Dowling, E. M. (2006). On making humans human: Spirituality and the promotion of positive youth development. The handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence, 60-72.

Lerner, R. M., Roesner, R. W., Phelps, E., & Benson, P. (2008). Positive Youth Development and Spirituality: From Theory to Research (First edition). Templeton Press

Kwon, S., (2018). The politics of global youth participation. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 22(7), pp.926-940.

Weiss, J., (2020). What Is Youth Political Participation? Literature Review on Youth Political Participation and Political Attitudes. *Frontiers in Political Science, 2*.

AFRICA / EUROPE Session B3

JOHN MARION, WE'RE FOUND TOGETHER, APART: YOUNG PEOPLE'S SENSE OF BELONGING AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR MINISTRY DURING A PANDEMIC

A sense of belonging is a human need (Baumeister & Leary 1995). For young people, a sense of belonging is connected to their identity development and wellbeing (Benson 2007; Foster et al. 2017). A sense of belonging is also important for their inclusion in communities of faith and their spiritual development (Saarelainen 2018; Shepherd 2013). However, our inability to meet face-to-face in groups has disrupted our usual assumptions and practices belonging. How do we nurture a sense of belonging in young people when we cannot meet together?

This presentation will explore recent research conducted with both young people and youth ministry leaders in the context of literature around belonging, to help develop our understanding of how young people experience belonging, how youth leaders practice it, and the role it plays in youth ministry. A sense of belonging was found to be connected to young people's experiences of transformation, and youth leaders shared practices of belonging such as inclusion, welcome, participation, and creating fictive kinship groups. By understanding how belonging works in the lives of young people and their experiences of youth

ministry, we can explore what practices may apply in pandemic conditions to nurture their development, connect them to supportive communities, and find a place in the family of God.

References

Baumeister, R & Leary, M 1995, 'The need to belong: desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation', *Psychological bulletin*, vol. 117, pp. 497-529.

Benson, PL 2007, *Developmental assets: an overview of theory, research, and practice*, SAGE Publications, London.

Foster, CE, Horwitz, A, Thomas, A, Opperman, K, Gipson, P, Burnside, A, Stone, DM & King, CA 2017, 'Connectedness to family, school, peers, and community in socially vulnerable adolescents', *Children and Youth Services Review*, vol. 81, pp. 321-31.

Saarelainen, S-MK 2018, 'Lack of belonging as disrupting the formation of meaning and faith', *Journal of Youth and Theology*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 127-49.

Shepherd, NM 2013, 'Religious socialisation and a reflexive habitus: Christian youth groups as sites for identity work', in SD Collins-Mayo & PD Dandelion (eds), *Religion and youth*, Ashgate, Farnham, UK.

AMERICA Session A1

ELIZABETH W. CORRIE, "HELPING YOUTH BECOME WISE AS SERPENTS AND INNOCENT AS DOVES: PEACE EDUCATION WITH YOUTH IN THE MIDST OF CIVIL UPHEAVAL"

IASYM Online Colloquium 2021 Proposal: North American Regional Block
"Helping Youth Become Wise as Serpents and Innocent as Doves: Peace Education with Youth in the Midst of Civil Upheaval"
Elizabeth W. Corrie, Ph.D.
Associate Professor in the Practice of Youth Education and Peacebuilding
Candler School of Theology, Emory University
Atlanta, GA
ecorrie@emory.edu

Ministry with youth must contend with at least five pandemics in the United States: 1) the COVID-19 global health pandemic; 2) a sudden and devastating economic downturn; 3) the erosion of church denominations through decline and schism; 4) white supremacy and racialized violence; and 5) political polarization. These pandemics have upended every facet of life for teenagers: their churches and communities are split, their in-person connections to worship, school and activities have been severed, and they face a future marked by violence, injustice, and failed leadership. My current book project, *Youth Ministry as Peace Education: Cultivating Faith that Overcomes Silence and Transforms Violence*, seeks to provide a youth ministry model that can equip young people with theological and practical tools for engaging the challenges of division, violence, and injustice.

In my presentation, I will draw on two facets coming out of my current research. First, I will trace the historical development of youth activism, providing a framework for understanding the current challenges young leaders face as they press for racial justice and mobilize for long-term changes to the United States' democratic system. Second, I will share one approach to teaching young people skills in

nonviolent action informed by the research of scholars in social movements and nonviolence theory, and rooted in the wisdom of Jesus, who advised his disciples to be "wise as serpents and innocent as doves."

TRACEY LAMONT, ACCOMPANYING THE LONELY: PRACTICING SYNODALITY IN MINISTRY WITH CATHOLIC YOUNG ADULTS

Abstract:

There is a growing disconnect between the way young people form community and their experience of church and how ministry leaders engage young people in the faith and the community. Using the method of practical theology, this research proposal provides a thick description of the experiences of young adults ages 18-30 and the current ministry practices in most Catholic parishes in the United States, in light of sociological and psychological research and Pope Francis's theology of synodality, to enable ministry leaders to re-engage young people in the life of the church.

Introduction

Changes in society and culture have had a ripple effect on Catholic parish life. Family dynamics have changed drastically, youth and young adult disaffiliation is increasing, and a growing number of young people see the Church and religion as inconsequential to their lives. The parish was once a place people gathered in community and felt supported and spiritually nourished; however, fewer youth and young adults today are seeking out Catholic parishes for such support. Yet, the need for community and belonging has not changed–in fact, it has grown.

Young people connect with others instantly through technology; however, research shows increasing trends in loneliness and isolation. Loneliness, according to Springtide Research Institute (2020), has pervasive and damaging effects on our young people. One in three young people feel utterly alone and feelings of loneliness can increase a person's risk of death by over 25%. The 2018 Synod on Young People, The Faith, and Vocational Discernment revealed young people struggle to find quality mentors or a sense of belonging in their faith communities; meanwhile, research shows that the presence of just one mentor or trusting adult in the lives of young people reduces their feeling of loneliness by half (Packard et al. 2020, 48).

The COVID-19 pandemic is further changing social, religious, and cultural patterns of living in new ways. Many young people express concern that they have not heard from anyone from their parish (priests, staff, volunteers). Few ministry leaders have reached out to them during this period of isolation to ask how the church can support them during what can be a very isolating time filled with grief, bereavement, loneliness, uncertainty, and fear. Many of our parish communities were struggling to engage young people before this pandemic, noting the ever-increasing trend in religious disaffiliation, and this crisis has exacerbated this issue.

Pope Francis, in his post synodal exhortation *Christus Vivit*, urges ministry leaders to become a more synodal church, one where the people of God journey together as a faith community to create a more just and compassionate world. He encourages faith communities to give young people access to quality mentors who will accompany them in life and help them become rooted in community (2019, #244, #179). Roots build strength, connections, and relationships seldom found in a highly technological society. Without roots and the practice of discernment, both of which emerge within the context of community, "we can easily become prey to every passing trend" (Francis 2019, #279). The depth and richness of our

spiritual traditions, the art and practice of listening and discernment, and the social justice ministries of our faith communities, when re-envisioned around the sociocultural and psychological changes facing our young people today, can give people such roots and a sense of purpose and belonging.

Methodology

This research proposal uses the method of practical theology to explore how the parish, when revitalized to become more a synodal church, can be a place where young people are accompanied by quality mentors who listen to and recognize them, show them they do belong, and help root them in a faith community. The method of practical theology begins by observing and describing peoples lived experiences, then asks what is going on, in what contexts do these observations emerge, and why might this be happening, and what operative assumptions keep this issue unresolved (Browning, 1991)? The researcher, upon providing a thick description of the lives of young people, examines these trends through multiple disciplines, including sociology, psychology, and the Christian Tradition to interpret how best the church can respond. This proposal explores how, in listening to the voices of young people, their experiences of church, and how they form community, Catholic ministry leaders can re-envision their ministry practices and model of church in response to Pope Francis's invitation to become a more synodal church.

References
Browning, Don 1991. *Fundamental Practical Theology.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Press.
Gaillardetz, Richard R., and Edward P. Hahnenberg. 2015. *A church with open doors: Catholic ecclesiology for the third millennium*. Liturgical Press: Collegeville MN.
International Theological Commission. 2018 *Synodality in the Life of the Church*. Rome, 3 Mar. retrieved from
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinoda lita_en.html.
Packard, Josh, John M. Vitek, Jerry Ruff, Brian Singer-Towns, and Ellen B. Koneck. 2020. *Belonging: Reconnecting America's Loneliest Generation*.Springtide Research Institute: Bloomington, MN.
Pope Francis, *Apostolic Constitution, Episcopalis Communio*, Rome: September 18, 2018, retrieved from
http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/papa-francesco_costituzione-ap_20180915_episcopaliscommunio.html
——, *Cristus Vivit: Christ is Alive,* Rome: March 25, 2019, retrieved from
http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papafrancesco_esorta zione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html#_ftn148
Seemiller, Corey, and Maghan Grace. 2019. *Generation Z: A century in the making*. New York: Routledge.

SETH VOPAT, YOUTH AGENCY IN A SECULAR AGE

Youth agency has been essential to faith formation with young people in the church in the United States of America, but why? This idea has been an accepted premise which is seldom explored in depth. This is possibly why the North American church's efforts towards creating opportunities for young people to have agency in the church has resulted more in youth "tokenism" than it has actual agency. How do we help churches move from a praxis of youth "tokenism" to youth agency?

In a secular age, it is possible youth agency is even more important than ever as an opportunity where young people can encounter the divine in a world which struggles to encounter any type of transcendence as Charles Taylor argues. And not only youth agency, but youth agency amidst peers in a place which they consider a "safe space"

This presentation will draw upon research hunches from work with 12 churches from a variety of social and ethnic locations across the United States of America. For the past few years these churches have been involved with the Log College project through the Institute for Youth Ministry at Princeton Theological Seminary. Other sources used in this presentation will include ethnography, the philosophical work of Charles Taylor, observations from psychologist Jerome Bruner, and design thinking.

Academic Institution:

- Researcher for Princeton Theological Seminary's Institute for Youth Ministry

Brief Bio:

Rev. Seth Vopat for the past few years as been working as a researcher for the Log College Project through the Institute for Youth Ministry at Princeton Theological Seminary. He presented a paper at the European IASYM in 2014 in the Czech Republic. For the past four years he has also served on the ministry team at a Disciple's of Christ congregation in the Kansas City area where he primarily works with young people.

AMERICA Session B1

JODI HUNT, WHERE NONE ARE GATHERED: KEEPING DIGITALLY MARGINALIZED YOUTH CONNECTED TO FAITH & COMMUNITY

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, digital youth ministry was reserved for sharing information about events in relation to youth program nights. Today, six months after the global pandemic shut down youth program gatherings and other church services, youth ministry has had to scramble to find its ministerial footing in a sea of digital spheres. Although many youth ministry programs have been successful in staying connected to the youth that they serve, many are still struggling to re-engage youth in their faith and staying connected to youth who live on the margins. This proposed paper/presentation will explore the question: 'how can digital youth ministry keep youth connected to each other, their faith, and church communities through the digital spaces that youth inhabit?' This paper/presentation, will explore this question through the lens and process of Holland and Peter Henriot's 'pastoral circle," a theological reflective process that will also frame a discernment upon how robust digital youth ministry programs can address rapid religious/spiritual disaffiliation among youth in the 'age of pandemics.'

In relation to the benefits that this paper and proposal will offer practitioners of youth ministry, the conversational work that it will present aims to offer practical points of action in relation to how digital youth ministry can fill the gaps between the Church and its youth left behind by the most recent pandemic. In doing so, this presentation will analyze the current situation, the social causes contributing to disconnected digital spaces and the communion of persons as well as explore possible meaningful action plans that youth ministers should consider when meeting the spiritual needs of the youth they minister to

through the use of digital tools. This paper/presentation will also lean on the language of sacramental communion as well as offer a definition of 'digital youth ministry' for consideration in framing imaginative ministerial approaches for youth ministers to use when they find that they cannot practice youth ministry in digital spaces. In the end, the presentation/paper and subsequent conversations will also offer an opportunity to reflect upon digital youth ministerial practices as we work together to consider: what has and has not been working?

Working Bibliography

Benedict. *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today*. San Francisco [Calif.]: Ignatius Press, 1996.

Campbell, Heidi A, Stephen Garner, William Dyrness, and Robert Johnston. *Networked Theology (Engaging Culture): Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016. http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=5248646.

Esler, Philip Francis. *New Testament Theology: Communion and Community*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.

Faix, Tobias. "Hybrid Identity: Youth in Digital Networks." *Journal of Youth and Theology* 15, no. 1 (April 28, 2016): 65–87. https://doi.org/10.1163/24055093-01501005.

Gardner, Howard, and Katie Davis. *The App Generation: How Today's Youth Navigate Identity, Intimacy, and Imagination in a Digital World*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013.

Kendall, Peggy. *Rewired: Youth Ministry in an Age of IM and MySpace*. 1st ed. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2007.

Le Duc, Anthony. "Cyber/Digital Theology: Rethinking About Our Relationship with God and Neighbor in the Digital Environment." *Religion and Social Communication.* 13, no. 2 (2015): 132–58.

———. "Cybertheology: Theologizing in the Digital Age." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2016. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3056269.

"LIII World Communications Day, 2019 - « 'We Are Members One of Another' (Eph 4,25). From Social Network Communities to the Human Community » | Francis." Accessed July 17, 2020. http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco_20190124_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html.

McIntosh, Esther. "Belonging without Believing." *International Journal of Public Theology* 9, no. 2 (June 2, 2015): 131–55. https://doi.org/10.1163/15697320-12341389.

Osborne, Kenan B. *Sacramental Theology: A General Introduction*. New York: Paulist Press, 1988.

Ostrowski, Ally. "Cyber Communion Finding God in the Little Box." *Journal of Religion and Society* 8 (2006). http://hdl.handle.net/10504/64523.

Phillips, Peter, Kyle Schiefelbein-Guerrero, and Jonas Kurlberg. "Defining Digital Theology: Digital Humanities, Digital Religion and the Particular Work of the CODEC Research Centre and Network." *Open Theology* 5, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 29–43. https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2019-0003.

Schmidt, Katherine G. *Virtual Communion: Theology of the Internet and the Catholic Sacramental Imagination*. Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2020.

Seemiller, Corey, and Meghan Grace. *Generation Z: A Century in the Making*. London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019.

"Some Aspects of The Church Understood as Communion." Accessed June 17, 2020. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_28051992_communionis-notio_en.html.

Spadaro, Anthony. *Cybertheology Thinking Christianity in the Era of the Internet*. Fordham University Press, 2014.

Vorgrimler, Herbert. *Sacramental Theology*. Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1992.

"XLVIII World Communications Day, 2014 - Communications at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter | Francis." Accessed July 7, 2020. http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco_20140124_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html.

Zirschky, Andrew. *Beyond the Screen: Youth Ministry for the Connected but Alone Generation*, 2015. http://site.ebrary.com/id/11221248.

Zsupan-Jerome, Daniella. *Connected toward Communion: The Church and Social Communication in the Digital Age*, 2014.

AMERICA Session B2

TAMRA FROMM, YOUNG BLACK LIVES MATTER IN DETROIT… TO A WHITE PASTOR

Young black lives matter in Detroit… to a white pastor

In one of the most dangerous zip codes in the United States, 48205 (or 4820-DIE, as it is called by locals), Pastor Ken Leiter heard a call from God to build a ministry to Detroit neighborhood teens. Since then Leiter, a white pastor, is changing the narrative for young Black males, one at a time.

Since the mid-1980s, Leiter has adapted his method of outreach from pizza parties at a little storefront church to attracting kids through "hoops." Because many teens today have grown up without a religious or church background, Leiter believes in proclaiming the Gospel right away during the Monday night basketball game.

"I was heading down the wrong path," Jamir confesses. "Like stealing from stores and stuff. When he turned me to Jesus, it turned my whole life around."

But the lessons do not end with the spiritual. The foundation of Leiter's ministry is a Tier program, which is used to both define and challenge teens in a journey of discipleship. Leiter identifies youth who have leadership potential and gives them opportunities to pray with others. Teens in the top level, Tier 1, then do the vetting of their peers.

Each teen must have a sponsor to enter the church building. Good attendance —but also a good attitude— gains rewards, which seem to give the youth inspiration to stick around. Leiter says he gets to know the sponsored kids a little better because they are around the church more.

Every week Leiter plans an outing for the Tier 1 "faithful ones," often some activity outdoors. Sometimes the teens encounter prejudices: "Black kids can't ski!"

The urban familial environment is more brutal than before. Some children move every year to a different home and live with a different relative, whether a grandmother or uncle. Because of this, urban youth ministry needs to provide authentic role models.

Although Leiter is now 60 years old, the teens still relate to him as a "dad." Despite the age differential, the teens feel they can talk to him about anything. Says Devontae, Leiter is "my spiritual father. If I was to call him and ask him for something, I'm pretty sure he would do it for me. If he called and asked me for something, I'd jump up and give it to him, like in a heartbeat."

Leiter's vision is to help urban youth learn a trade or skill that they can take with them as they move into the wider world. Some of his Tier 1 teens get practical experience working with him on site with woodworking or home improvement projects, while others work in landscaping.

Still, the heart of the ministry is Christ. Leiter encourages the teens to develop a relationship with God outside of the building boundaries, to talk to God at home and in school. "It's important for them to keep God in their day."

AMERICA Session B3

Jillinda A. Weaver, Learning Antiracism with Youth on Zoom: a Reflection

The Youth Theological Initiative (YTI) at Emory University has offered summer residential theological training to youth since 1993. In recent years, we have expanded our offerings throughout the year with our YTI IMPACT program. When it became clear that it would be unsafe to offer our usual residential program in the summer of 2020, we began to imagine ways that we could expand our online offerings. Then, as the focus of the country shifted to examining US practices of white supremacy, particularly in law enforcement, we felt called to offer an online space where youth could think about these issues critically and theologically.

We initially offered two groups. The first was a Black-only space where adult mentors offered support to youth as they together worked through the racial stress they continued to experience in both new and chronic ways. The second group was for all youth interested in learning about antiracism and included Black, white, Latino, and Asian youth. As the current director of YTI and a white woman, I facilitated the second group and hired a professional facilitator who is Black for the first.

The first group concluded after the initial 8 weeks. The scholars, as we call our youth participants, felt a need to conclude because of the pressures of the school year. The antiracism group decided to continue after the initial 8 weeks, but to meet every other week to better balance it with their schoolwork.

This paper will offer a theological reflection on the ongoing work of the interracial group and what we learned in the process of offering an online space for young people to explore antiracism in the current US context. This will include reflection on how my own social location impacts this work.