

# Let's Talk About...Teens

In last month's newsletter, we had the opportunity to learn something about how our teenagers understand the world. I don't want us to forget that. Our teenagers live in this country without any say in our political system, and church should not be yet another place where they're disenfranchised. Church ought to reflect God's kingdom, and I believe in a Christ who wanted to hear not only from teens, but from little children! So, let's talk about teenagers.

While a lot of today's teens certainly have plenty to say about LGBTQIA+ (or what was that long one Lily used? LGBTTTQQ2SA) identities, that's not the only area where they have knowledge and well-informed opinions to share.

For starters, each new generation on this planet seems to become increasingly concerned about the environment—with good reason: our youngest friends are the ones who expect to live with the consequences of our actions or inactions around creation care for the longest! We're trying to form a green team at our church to lead us towards a better relationship with the environment. I wonder if any of our youth would be interested in joining such a team?

Another generational shift surrounds mental health. My grandparents' generation would rarely admit to going to counseling. Today, youth and young adults will volunteer that information and then launch into a discussion of which medications they've tried and consider the value of medication and the value of talk therapy and whether they do better with one or the other or both. I wonder if we have teenagers whose ideas could help expand our Abundant Health Team's mental health wing?

Our youth group works hard to fundraise what's needed for their mission trips and projects. I wonder, given the opportunity, if any of our entrepreneurial youth would have something to say about church finance?

Teens, like any other people I know, enjoy people coming together around food. I wonder if we're missing an innovative solution to our need for a hospitality team?

And of course, it's not all about us and our existing plans. What hopes and dreams do our teenagers have for our church's impact in the community, and how can we help them bring those ideas to life?

I'm asking a lot of questions, and offering no answers, because I am not a teenager. Teens in our country today navigate overbooked schedules, high-pressure schooling, and heightened concerns about their safety in schools, plus the pandemic and other stressors that we are all trying to live with nowadays. I'm quite certain they can speak for themselves and lead others, if we give them the chance.

Next time you have a moment to chat with a teen, try asking: "What do you think about \_\_\_\_\_?" and just listen!

Mayor Wilmot Collins of Helena, Montana reminded the lay members of our Annual Conference that it's vitally important to take young people and their ideas seriously. We need to start listening to them right now, not just when they've grown up. So, how can we support our church's teenagers, like we promised to do at their baptisms? How can we empower our teenagers to bring God's vision of creation to life in our world?

I don't know. You'll have to ask them!