

2015 Youth Worker Retreat

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“What if we stopped being angry with parents for doing exactly what we’ve taught them to do and told them not that we could do it better, but that they can do it best?”

– Amy Kippen

This year’s Youth Worker Retreat, “Real Solutions for Involving Parents in Faith Formation at Church and Home” was led by Amy Kippen, Director of Faith Formation and Katie Burrington, Youth Director, both serving at Faith Lutheran and Journey in Faith in West Fargo, ND. They hit this topic head on and the thirty-two people attending the retreat at Shores of St. Andrew Bible Camp were treated to a day of truth, inspiration, practical tips and hope.

First, we discussed the state of affairs;

- Why do we do faith formation?
- What is the history of faith formation in the church?
- What are the best and worst aspects of Sunday School, Confirmation and Youth Group?

We named that we do faith formation for many reasons, but the main reason is to create lifelong followers of Jesus.

We learned that faith formation took place in the home until the 1780’s in England when gin became available and many hard working parents used the alcohol to numb their lives. Sunday School was created to teach morality and literacy to unsupervised children. It was never intended for Christian children. Over time, churches took over Christian education and parents relied on the church to teach what used to be taught in the home.

According to an ELCA study, in 1990, there were one million kids in Sunday School. In 2010, there were 400,000 kids in Sunday School. In only twenty years, ELCA Sunday School enrollment has gone down 60%. If the church were a corporation, we surely would have completely reimagined faith formation by now. No doubt, there are definitely benefits to Sunday School, but could we do better?

In the afternoon Amy and Katie shared a new way to be church. They shared the changes their congregation has come to embrace over the past ten years. Their goal was to fix what was wrong with current faith formation systems and keep what is working. They have taken on the mission “to bless the child and gift the family every week at church and every night at home.” Sunday School was reimagined into GIFT, a vehicle for multigenerational, multisensory faith formation. Confirmation and Youth Group evolved as well, both benefitting from parents who see the church as an ally in their most important job of all, raising competent, confident, lifelong followers of Jesus.

In addition to sharing practical tools for bringing theory into action, Amy and Katie shared multi-use method for changing culture and relating with others. This method can be used in a wide variety of situations. It can be used with people who don’t want to change, with people who are angry, fearful, hurting or just concerned. In fact, I used it with my nine-year-old son the other morning when he was anxious about wearing his new jacket to school.

1. Validate – “I understand that you are concerned. I know life is busy and it’s very difficult to commit to something new.”
2. Cast the Vision – “What if there were a way for you and your son to have an open, honest relationship?”
3. Challenge – “Will you trust me? Could you try GIFT for five weeks?”
4. Encourage – “Thank you for trying this. It looks like you and your son are really enjoying this time together.”
5. Repeat, Repeat, Repeat.

There were many more gems of discovery, challenge and inspiration throughout this retreat. Sometimes we leave retreats like this overwhelmed and weighed down by the ideas we believe we’ll never be able to communicate or execute. But the feeling in the room at the end of this retreat was light, joyful and full of hope.

A case study of Amy Kippen’s experience at Faith Lutheran and Journey in Faith may be found in [Let’s Kill Sunday School \(Before it Kills the Church\)](#) by Dr. Rich Melheim and Friends. www.faithink.com