Welcome from the Conference Director

Dear AYME Friends,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, welcome to Minneapolis! For 26 years we have gathered annually as faculty, ministry leaders, and graduate students to expand our perspectives, consider our research, and advance our teaching approaches. This year, we are thrilled to be led by two leading researchers who will help us understand the latest faith formation trends that impact youth ministry education.

Richard Flory (PhD, University of Chicago) is the senior director of research and evaluation at the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture. He will share with us the most recent research based on the cohort associated with the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR). This cohort, through studies led by Dr. Christian Smith (Soul Searching and Souls in Transition), has matured to their mid to late twenties. Flory’s research captures insights into this cohort’s faith trajectories. His book will be published in early 2020, and we will get a preview of this important work.

Jenna Sethi (PhD, University of Minnesota), is a lead researcher at the Search Institute which has provided years of research that have informed social, educational, and religious organizations about young people, positive youth development, and the support they need through 40 Developmental Assets. Sethi is currently leading one of the Search Institute’s newest initiatives that seek to understand how young people’s relationships impact their faith formation. We are one of the first groups to hear and interact with their findings.

The contexts, questions, and challenges impacting the young people we serve are perpetually changing. Studies led by Flory and Sethi can help us remain vigilant in our work toward understanding young people, inspiring courage to revisit our own assumptions, and evoking our imaginations. In addition, we are eager to engage in academic paper presentations from our peers. We extend our thanks to all of them for their investment!

Whether you are an AYME veteran or this is your first year, we hope this conference provides you with fresh insights and great conversations. Often, these are the spaces that evoke significant moments where an idea is born and a conversation partner is made. Each one of you has something to offer and we are honored to host you!

Gratefully,

Steve Argue, Ph.D.
Vice-President and Conference Director


www.aymeducators.org
Our Plenary Speakers

Dr. Richard Flory
USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture
University of Southern California

Dr. Richard Flory (PhD, University of Chicago) is senior director of research and evaluation at the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture. He is a sociologist whose research focuses on religious and cultural change, religion and urban life, and the religious and spiritual lives of youth and young adults. He has published several books, most recently, *Disconnected Souls: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford University Press, 2017), which tracks the population (now in their mid-late 20s), studied by the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR). Flory has been quoted by a variety of publications, including the *L.A. Times*, the *New York Times*, *Buzzfeed News* and *NPR*, and he has written for publications such as *Religion Dispatches*, *The Conversation*, *Patheos* and *Zócalo Public Square*.

Dr. Jenna Sethi
Research Scientist
Search Institute, Minneapolis, MN

Dr. Sethi (PhD, University of Minnesota) is a full-time Research Scientist at Search Institute (Minneapolis, MN). Her work informs program implementation and improvement in schools, youth development, and community settings as well as reporting to practitioner, policy and academic audiences. She has over 20 years of experience as a youth worker and over 10 years of experience conducting qualitative research. She is also a member of the Community Faculty in the Youth Studies program and teaches at the University of Minnesota. Her latest study explores how faith is formed in young people through their most significant relationships.
# Faith Formation Trends That Impact Youth Ministry Education

## Daily Schedule

**Saturday, October 19**
- 1:00—3:00 p.m. Registration & Welcome Reception (Terrace Area, 6th Floor)
- 3:30 p.m. Opening Plenary Session (Ballroom, 4th Floor)
  
  Dr. Richard Flory, University of Southern California
- 5:00 p.m. Break & Exhibitors Open
- 6:00 p.m. Dinner & Plenary Session (Ballroom, 4th Floor)
  
  Dr. Richard Flory, University of Southern California
- 8:30 p.m Exhibitors Open & Free Time to Connect

**Sunday, October 20**
- 8:00 a.m. Breakfast on your own & Personal Reflection on your own
- 10:00 a.m. Plenary Session (Ballroom, 4th Floor)
  
  Dr. Jenna Sethi, Search Institute
- 11:30 a.m. Break & Exhibitors Open
- 12:00 p.m. Lunch & Business Meeting (Ballroom, 4th Floor)
- 1:15 p.m. Break & Exhibitors Open
- 1:30 p.m. Plenary Session (Ballroom, 4th Floor)
  
  Dr. Jenna Sethi, Search Institute
- 3:00 p.m. Academic Presentation Sessions #1 (Breakout Rooms, 8th Floor)
- 4:00 p.m. Academic Presentation Sessions #2 (Breakout Rooms, 8th Floor)
- 5:00 p.m. Academic Presentation Sessions #3 (Breakout Rooms, 8th Floor)
- 6:45 p.m. Leave for Dinner @ Rock Bottom Restaurant & Brewery
  
  Depart from ground floor, street level. See directions on page 4.
- 8:30 p.m. Free Time to Connect

**Monday, October 21**
- 7:30 a.m. Breakfast on your own
- 8:30 a.m. Academic Presentation Sessions #4 (Breakout Rooms, 8th Floor)
- 9:30 a.m. Academic Presentation Sessions #5 (Breakout Rooms, 8th Floor)
- 10:30 a.m. Closing Plenary Dialogue (Ballroom, 4th Floor)
  
  Steve Argue & Ben Espinoza
- 11:30 a.m. Conference Ends See you in Albuquerque for AYME 2020!
**Sunday Dinner**  
(Included in your conference reservation)

*We invite you to enjoy downtown Minneapolis Sunday Evening.*

*We have 7:00PM dinner reservations at the*  
**Rock Bottom Resturant and Brewery**  
825 Hennepin Avenue  
612-332-2739

*If you are enjoying the city before dinner please arrive at the Rock Bottom no later than 7:00PM.*

*If you want to walk to the Rock Bottom as a group, meet on the ground floor of the hotel, 7th Street, at 6:45PM.*

*Just a 5 minute walk from the Marriott City Center*
Academic Presentations

Academic Presentation Session #1  Sunday, 3:00—4:45PM

Spring Park Bay:
“A Comparative Analysis of Bible Software and Digital Libraries”
by Nishanth Thomas, Talbot School of Theology
What will it take to make disciples of Jesus among emerging adults in America today? This presentation will map the cultural and religious landscape of emerging adulthood by answering three crucial questions: 1) Are emerging adults today less religious than those of previous generations? 2) What are the religious lives of emerging adults like? 3) What are the causes of these patterns of religion and spirituality among emerging adults? In missiological terms, multiple people groups can be found among emerging adults, and that reality must inform disciple making efforts.

Wayzata Bay:
“A Qualitative Study Exploring Childhood Experiences Contributing to Christian Commitment in Young Adulthood”
by Stacey Davis, Biola University
A study conducted Fall 2018 sought to understand the childhood experiences that contribute to Christian commitment in young adulthood. In-depth interviews and grounded theory were utilized on 21 participants between 22 and 30 years old. Results from this study created seven themes revealing the childhood experiences that contribute to Christian commitment in young adulthood. Findings created implications for youth ministries, Christian schools, and families.

Gray’s Bay:
“The Role of Social Engagement as an Integral Component of Faith Formation for Young People”
by Tommy Carrington, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
There has been much conversation around the issues of “social justice” and “social engagement.” Research indicates that the current generation resonates with the message of social justice causes, and that civic engagement significantly impacts their faith maturity. From Jesus’ own teachings, to the practices in the early church, social engagement was pervasive, and deemed an integral component of the Christian faith. The paper will examine current trends in social engagement, and show how they relate to the spiritual formation of young people.

Excelsior Bay:
“Enhancing your Teaching with Axis Youth Culture Resources”
by Sarah Schepens and Kelli Rankin, Axis
This session will demonstrate how Axis youth culture resources can enhance your classroom curriculum and help those studying youth ministry to be better equipped to serve students and train volunteers. As part of this demonstration we will compare traditional responses to youth culture with Axis’ culture translation approach, and outline Axis’ One Conversation Model, which fosters conversations that engage the hearts and minds of students.
Academic Presentations

Academic Presentation Session #2                  Sunday, 4:00—4:45pm

Spring Park Bay:
“Faith Formation in Glocalized Nigerian Youth Ministry Context”
by OJ Dickson, ECWA Nigeria
Faith formation is the process of grooming religious ideologies and praxis in an individual, denomination and community with the goal of experiencing spiritual transformation. In the Nigerian glocalized youth ministry context, faith formation is embedded in religious and cultural belief systems. This paper seeks to explore how the faith formation of youth can be cultivated through the trends of youth ministry academicians, practitioners and administrators as cultural and religious gatekeepers engaging the autoethnographic approach.

Wayzata Bay:
“Training Youth Ministry Students to Teach”
by Len Kageler, Nyack College, Mike Severe, Taylor University, Karen Jones, Huntington University, Jim Hampton, Asbury Theological Seminary, and Elizabeth Bjorling Poest, StoryFarmers
What attention is teaching our students to teach given in the youth ministry degree programs within AYME? Here we examined books and papers reviewed or included in JYM since its inception. AYME members were interviewed and these interviews were recorded transcribed, and coded. We queried the resources used, the class time allotted, the assignments given, and the fieldwork required. We also queried assessment practices. Our findings give us a good feel for what is happening in AYME member degree programs and what are some of the norms and best practices when it comes to teaching students to teach.

Gray’s Bay:
“Forming Youth Through Engagement in Holistic Christian Practices”
by Caleb Roose and Tyler Greenway, Fuller Youth Institute, and Steven Argue, Fuller Theological Seminary
Engaging young people in Christian practices that are participatory, ongoing, personal, communal, embodied, and incremental can shape young people’s identities, belonging, and purposes according to the Christian narrative. For this presentation we (1) define and advocate for the importance of these Christian practice characteristics, (2) illustrate these characteristics through a youth ministry case study focused on lament, and (3) review testimonial and assessment data that demonstrate the formative effects of teenagers holistically engaging in lament and other Christian practices.

Excelsior Bay:
“Familial Factors that Impact Adolescent Faith: A Study of Committed AG Families”
by Lisa Howard, Johnson University
Amid concerns regarding youth disenchanted with Christian faith, this research examined perceptions of familial practices that impact adolescent faith from the viewpoint of families with longevity in an established church. Themes are compared to established literature and suggestions to help consistently instill Christian beliefs in the next generation are provided to parents, adolescents, and ministry leaders. Findings show that families who participant in prayer, rituals, relationships, authentic lifestyle, and parental role modeling promote adolescent faith.
Academic Presentations

Academic Presentation Session #3

Spring Park Bay:
“Creation and Charisma: A Theological Interplay of Youth and Ecology”
by Mike Langford, Seattle Pacific University
Studies show that youth are particularly conscious of ecological issues, and that authentic interaction with creation is deeply impressionable for them. While important at a broadly ethical and existential level, I would like to address this dynamic of youth and ecology theologically. By looking at anthropological factors, I would like to suggest that God’s creative activity promotes spiritual formation in ways that youth, because of their gifts, are uniquely able to discern.

Wayzata Bay:
“Creating New Spaces for Persons with DisAbilities”
by Leslie Long, Oklahoma City University
Students in a Theology of Ministry course used Networked Theology to begin a discussion about the role of technology and ministry. During the semester students worked together with the goal of examining how to make social media more accessible to people with disabilities. Although practicality was important they looked deeper—how can the church use social media to reach out in a meaningful and open way to people who are often overlooked or set aside? Can authentic church community be built online? Are we missing the mark when it comes to the use of technology for engaging people of all abilities? This paper explores issues of community, ministry, and outreach with an emphasis on people with disabilities. (I plan to have one student join me to present.)

Gray’s Bay:
“The Remix: Hip-hop As a Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for Religiously Educating Youth”
by Sharise Wigfall, New York Theological Seminary
One significant reason that accounts for the lack of engagement with biblical content among young people is related to cultural relevancy. One option to consider when exploring alternative methods for biblical engagement is the significance and relevance of the cultures that are shaping and influencing the lives of urban youth. Hip-hop culture particularly is one of today’s most popular and influential cultural movements and forms of art. Hip-hop, I argue, is a cultural relevant pedagogy essential for religiously educating youth.
Academic Presentations

Academic Presentation Session #4                Monday, 8:30—9:15AM

Spring Park Bay:
“Locus Adventus: A Theological Anthropology for Youth Ministry”
by Wesley Ellis, University of Aberdeen
Are young people human beings? It may strike youth workers as an absurd question with an obvious affirmative answer. But does our implicit anthropology and its epistemic scaffolding actually support the claim? This article will offer an eschatological anthropology which constitutes the human being as a *locus adventus*, a location for the coming of God, thus affording youth ministry an interpretive frame that allows youth workers to engage in the actuality of young people's experience.

Wayzata Bay:
“Wesleyan Band Meetings and the Formation of College Leaders”
by Cheryl Rude and Wendy Mohler-Seib, Southwestern College
The presentation explores theological and practical connections between Wesleyan bands and leadership development theory. Data was collected from six young adults who gathered weekly in bands for one semester. Survey and interview instruments prompted students to reflect on their sense of personal Christian maturation and shaping influences in leadership development. Themes, patterns, and connections are identified related to the impact of the Wesleyan band experience.

Gray’s Bay:
“Scholarly Publishing in the Field of Youth Ministry”
by Ben Espinoza, Paul Kelly, and Brad Widstrom, Journal of Youth Ministry
The purpose of this professional development presentation is to share information regarding how to publish a variety of scholarly products in the Journal of Youth Ministry. The senior editor, senior associate editor, research review editor, and book review editor will all share their visions for their respective areas and the kinds of work that tends to get published in their areas. The workshop will also allow participants to ask the editors specific questions regarding the publishing their work.
Spring Park Bay:
“Calling but not Foreclosing: Clarifying Youth Ministry’s Approach to Discipleship”
by Chris Clements, McMaster Divinity College
As churches begin to feel anxious about losing their young people, the impulse to find more ‘effective’ approaches to faith formation can arise. Such approaches, though well-intended, may inadvertently become exercises in identity foreclosure. Using Søren Kierkegaard’s writings and the biblical book of Jonah, an approach to faith formation will be articulated that focuses on hearing God’s call. This approach avoids identity-foreclosing impulses by elevating the place of God’s action in faith formation.

Wayzata Bay:
“Relationships Matter: An Analysis of LCMS Young Adult Affiliation with the Church”
by Dave Reuter, Concordia University Irvine, Mark Kiessling and Julianna Shults, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod
In 2017, LCMS Youth Ministry partnered with LCMS Research and faculty from two of our Concordia Universities (Irvine, Chicago) to conduct a study of young adult retention in the LCMS and in the larger Christian church. This research is critical because LCMS statistics show that Millennials were baptized in smaller numbers than generations before, despite an increase in infant births nationwide. Retention rates beginning with the Baby Boom Generation have led to fewer and fewer young people in the pews. This two-part study sought to learn about Millennials, now young adults, and to help prepare for working with “Generation Z” who are currently in our senior high youth ministries.

Gray’s Bay:
“Generation Z and Spiritual Maturity: Challenges and Opportunities”
by Tom Bergler, Huntington University
This presentation will synthesize research findings on the characteristics of Generation Z, including the growing divide between more committed and less committed Christians, delayed maturation, the impact of smart phones and social media, high value on safety and financial security, views on diversity and civic engagement, and mental health challenges. This generational portrait will be analyzed in light of a biblical theology of spiritual maturity, resulting in a list of key opportunities and challenges youth ministers will face as they seek to make mature disciples among this generation. For each generational trait, recommendations will be offered regarding how to foster spiritual maturity.
An exploration of how this secular age has impacted the identity and practice of the pastor, obscuring his or her core vocation: to call and assist others into the experience of ministry.

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