

Youth Ministry Report

Youth Ministry Annual Report for 2020

If you had to repeat any years of your youth, you would probably not choose junior high or high school. Those are some of the most difficult moments in life, and they tend to shape one's future in ways you don't see until later. In addition to the normal challenges of junior and senior high youth face, 2020 has certainly added to them!

The losses this year were significant – especially for the youth. The first and almost immediate blow they received was the cancellation of the Great Britain Trip. Students who had saved for years and who waited for this coveted trip with great expectation, were unable to attend. Plays, and special events were cancelled. Graduation was postponed, and then moved to a tent, while limited to family only (with masks and distancing).

Then came the cancellations of our yearly Sacred Road Missions Trip to Yakima and the YXL trip to Colorado. We missed out on our park youth days, the Rainier's baseball game trip and harvest party. We held out great hope for the Snow Retreat in 2021 (which we were supposed to leave for in two days), but sadly Tall Timber had to cancel with us as well. Our newest freshmen had to start attending a new school, with a new class, a new youth group and all through a computer screen. Talk about awkward!

These challenges were difficult, there were many tears and much heartache over these losses, and at the same time, I noticed a quiet perseverance in our youth. A strength that showed their commitment to the Lord and their contentment in him. While there was some grieving over the loss, I never heard grumbling, whining or complaining. I mention this because of how unusual this is, and because of how thankful I am for our youth, their parents and our church. God is doing great things in our young people. And while it has been a hard year, I know that God is growing them in ways that will only make them better prepared for the challenges of life and will make them more godly men and women. While 2020 was a difficult year, we also saw God's provision and kindness in the midst of the loss.

By God's grace, we were able to start the year off enjoying our annual Snow Retreat in Leavenworth in January of 2020. Pastor Nathan Bonham (South America Director for MTW) gave four messages on "Fighting the Good Fight" to over 77 youth and volunteers present from FPC and other churches in our presbytery and area.

On March 11th and 18th, we cancelled youth group thinking that our precautions would only be necessary in the short-term. As cases increased and more edicts came, we realized that the two weeks of stay-at-home orders (with no end in sight) were starting to wear on all of us.

In response to that need, on March 24th we had our very first FPC youth group online. The Senior High began to meet via Zoom on Tuesdays at 6pm instead of Wednesdays, so the youth would not have to compete with family members over their computers and internet during prayer meeting. Later in the

Youth Ministry Report

summer the Junior High would begin meeting on Mondays as well with Karl Kvale and Abby St. John navigating the difficulties of “Zoom Youth Group”!

Over the first few months, the senior high had 25-30 youth join us online each week. I gave messages related to my online FPC devotionals on the Fruits of the Spirit from Galatians 5 and we sang along with YouTube recordings of hymns (after previous attempts of synchronized congregational singing over Zoom proved to be more painful than encouraging). We played versions of online charades, digital Pictionary and long-distance scavenger hunts. We had all sorts of competitions ranging from songs about COVID composed by the youth, to pandemic photos and stuntman video challenges. The winners of these competitions received prizes delivered via UberEATS and Amazon. It was always a happy moment when the doorbell rang to let the winners know that Krispy Kreme donuts, Jersey Mikes Sandwiches or games and books had been delivered to their doorsteps or stuffed into their mailboxes.

Close to graduation, we welcomed our new freshmen into the group and our seniors participated in their final youth group “Senior Interview” where they shared insights over their past four years with the others. On that night we had a special Zoom visit from Pastor Steven Nicoletti, who took the time to encourage many of the youth he had directly worked with throughout the years and encouraged them and prayed for them as they went on toward graduation.

At the end of June, Abby St. John, who was in the middle of planning a wedding in the middle of a pandemic, decided it would be wise to step down from co-leading junior high youth group. It was a sadness for us, but a completely understandable decision! Abby deserves our deepest gratitude for the many hours and days over these past years she gave to love and serve our church and youth so well. Thank you Abby!

On July 1st, after meeting online for three months, we were finally able to meet in person as a youth group again. We met under in the summer heat in the enormous 90 x 50-foot church tent the church rented for worship in the parking lot. While we had to meet masked, distanced and use a lot of hand sanitizer, we were thankful to be able to meet in person again. We got creative with water-balloon games and other distanced games and Pastor Gutierrez enjoyed using the megaphone a little too much.

When it started getting too dark and cold to meet outside, we brought in more volunteers to help manage the extra precautions that we needed to comply with in order to keep safe.

In October, Bethan Sullivan bravely and joyfully took on the call to take help co-lead the junior high youth group alongside Karl Kvale. Karl and Bethan have done an incredible job teaching and leading these youth, and for this we are so grateful.

On 9/28 youth group began meeting again on Wednesdays at 7pm indoors. With windows open, spaced out chairs, masks worn and distanced chairs we began to have some level of normalcy in DeSoto Hall.

Youth Ministry Report

While we are still not back to normal, we were so thankful to enjoy a joint Christmas-themed youth group with junior and senior high that included all the fixings of a delicious, individually packaged, Chick-fil-a dinner for everyone. It was a wonderful way to end the year with around 90 people in attendance (including staff and volunteers). Especially because at least half of the youth in attendance had never been to our youth group before!

This year, while many things were cancelled, God has provided for us in other wonderful ways. While we were locked in our homes, we were able to connect via Zoom. While we couldn't meet in person or as usual, we had pastoral zoom calls, distanced guys' and girls' discipleship groups (thank you Melissa McMillan and Wendy Tamminga), and grid-distanced white-elephant gift exchanges. There are so many things that I have left out. But all in all, even "in these years of famine" God has provided for us abundantly and for that I could not be more thankful.

God has always and will always be with us. He is faithful.

In Him,
Nathaniel Gutierrez
Assistant Pastor