

To the young people and the adults who support them in the Metro D.C. and Delaware-Maryland Synods,

This past year has been...well, there are a lot of words you could fill in there. For me, that list would include *stressful, frustrating, disappointing, and exhausting*. But as I think back through 2020 and the beginning of 2021, month by month, I remember that there were bright spots, too.

I saw the ways people cared for one another, making masks and distributing food to communities in need, and staying home to protect one another.

I think about how churches, by and large, had to close the doors to our buildings but never actually closed: holding services online, visiting members and friends from a safe distance, and trusting that even when we can't meet in person, God shows up.

And I consider the way young people like you had your classes, extracurricular activities, and friendships all take place almost entirely online - and I continue to be amazed at the ways you adapted and advocated for yourselves as we all figured out how to exist in the midst of a pandemic.

So, maybe, I could add *hopeful* to that list.

Now, as it seems like we're getting closer and closer to being able to gather in person, I am feeling that sense of hope even more fully. We will be closely monitoring community transmission rates, vaccine rollout, and in-person schooling statistics, but we are hopeful that we will be able to gather for youth events in the 2021-2022 school year. As we look forward to this possibility, we also invite you to consider becoming a part of the Lutheran Youth Organization (LYO), a leadership development program for those in grades 9-12 in the Delaware-Maryland and Metro D.C. Synods. Members of the LYO work throughout the year to hone leadership gifts they can use in their churches, schools, and communities, and these dedicated young people shape every aspect of our events for children and youth.

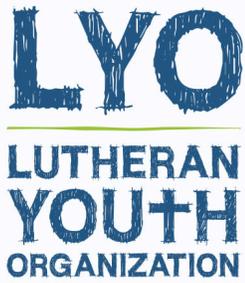
Attached, you'll find more information about the LYO and a description of the different teams that make up this organization. As you read it over, if you find yourself thinking, "Hmmm, this sounds like something I'm interested in" (or, "Hey, I know a young person who would be a great fit for this!"), **consider attending one of our LYO Info Sessions on Monday, April 19 or Tuesday, April 20 from 6:30-8 pm on Zoom**. You can learn more and register for a session [online](#). These sessions will include an overview of the program and calendar for the year, reflections from current members of the LYO community (students, families, youth workers, rostered ministers), a chance to ask your questions, and an opportunity to see some new faces from around our synods.

I am so appreciative of the ways our young people and invested adults have shown such brave and important leadership over this past year, and I look forward to getting to know you better in the months to come!

Peace,



Deacon Julie Stecker
Assistant to the Bishop for Youth + Family Ministry



The Lutheran Youth Organization is a leadership development program for youth in grades 9-12 who are members of congregations in the Delaware-Maryland and Metro D.C. Synods. Following an application process, youth who are accepted into the LYO are organized into one of **six teams** to live into their God-given gifts and sharpen their skills for service in our synod, their own congregation, and the surrounding community. Each team is mentored by two to three gifted adults.

The LYO year begins with the **Organizing Retreat**, held at Mar-Lu-Ridge toward the end of August. During this long weekend, members of the LYO receive training on a variety of topics that will serve them throughout the year, including active listening, peer ministry, leading devotions, and topics related to our annual theme. They also engage in service projects, play games, and worship together. The weekend provides them their first opportunity to gather with their whole team and imagine ways they might use their gifts to serve the young people of our synods. Before the end of the retreat, each team selects a **Leader Among Leaders** or two - peers who will help keep the team organized and working toward their goals, as well as serve as the liaison to the **Youth Events Team**, which has responsibility for general oversight of our events.

Every other month (September, November, January, March, and May), the LYO gathers for an **All-Team Meeting** on a Saturday, often meeting at centrally-located churches where our students are members. These meetings provide an opportunity for training on a particular leadership topic, frequently suggested by the Leaders Among Leaders, a chance for teams to meet together in person, and fellowship time to continue strengthening relationships within the LYO. Usually, teams will meet together in person or by Zoom in the months when an All-Team Meeting is not taking place.

One of the primary ways our LYO members put their leadership development into action is through the **planning and execution of several large events** throughout the year, including:

- FreeRide, a weekend event for youth in grades 6-8 in October
- RoadTrip, a weekend event for youth in grades 9-12 in January
- Transformers, a weekend leadership retreat for youth in grades 6-8 in the spring
- Retreat 345, a one-night retreat for children in grades 3-5 in the spring
- High School Leadership Event, a weekend retreat for youth who have completed grades 8-12 in the summer

Each LYO member also selects a **Congregational Mentor** who serves in an area that relates to the youth's team. This adult leader helps the LYO member reflect on what they are learning in LYO and how they can use those skills to lead in the congregation. The Congregational Mentor serves as an advocate for their student, and finds ways to lift up their work within the life of the congregation.

There is no membership fee to be a part of the LYO. The only costs are for events, which our Youth + Family Ministry budget partially subsidizes for LYO members. In the 2019-2020 year, these registration fees for LYO members totaled just under \$500. One additional cost to consider is transportation to and from meetings and events, though students are often able to carpool with those who live nearby. **Money should never be a reason you cannot participate in LYO.** We have event scholarships available specifically for LYO members, and we will provide whatever support we can if finances become an issue.

Teams of the LYO

- The **Worship Team** engages in learning about different worship experiences and practices, and then translates this learning into leading young people and adults in worship and praise during the synod youth events. The team also provides leadership for developing a prayerful and spiritual life of young people in the LYO and synod. *Young people for this team might be interested/gifted in visual arts, graphic design, drama, and public speaking, among other areas.*
- The **Music Team** engages in preparing for and leading the assembly in song through a variety of musical styles and methods at the synod youth events. Using a variety of vocal and instrumental methods, the team works to excel in their musical presentation as it connects to the wider worship and large group experience. *Young people for this team might be interested/gifted in singing, playing instruments, composing music, and sound engineering/mixing, among other areas.*
- The **Service & Outreach Team** engages in learning and participating in different service and outreach opportunities, and then brings some of these same opportunities to the synod youth events for practice and engagement. *Young people for this team might be interested/gifted in paying attention to the immediate needs and root causes of suffering and injustice in the world, among other areas.*
- The **Fellowship & Hospitality Team** engages in learning and practicing methods of fellowship and hospitality in the Church and community, and then brings these practices to the young people of the synod through music, games, food, and conversation. *Young people for this team might be interested/gifted in building relationships and community, helping others feel welcome, and looking out for those on the fringes of the group, among other areas.*
- The **Small Group Team** engages in training to effectively lead small groups of their peers in Biblical and topical discussions during the synod youth events. Young people on this team also engage in the curriculum-development process for the programming of events and retreats. *Young people for this team might be interested/gifted in helping facilitate discussion with their peers, teaching, and writing, among other areas.*
- The **Elementary Team** engages in learning about ministry with elementary age students (specifically grades 3-5) and preparing for and leading one-day events throughout the year and an overnight retreat in the spring for elementary aged students. Young people on this team also work with the other LYO teams to provide leadership to children in the congregations of our synod. *Young people for this team might be interested/gifted in working with elementary-aged students and interested in working with others to share their faith in creative ways.*

The LYO application process will open in Spring 2021 and consists of an online application form, an adult reference, a telephone or Zoom conversation with the applicant and at least one parent/guardian, and conversations with the applicant's pastor, deacon, and/or youth worker. Before applying, make sure you are available on the following dates:

- **Sunday, July 11, 2-4 pm:** Sorting Day, taking place via Zoom
- **Thursday, August 19-Sunday, August 22:** Organizing Retreat, taking place at Mar-Lu-Ridge (all new LYOers are required to attend the Organizing Retreat for at least one overnight, but the full retreat is strongly preferred)