



Friday, 04 September 2020, Volume V, Edition 1

WELCOME BACK!

Last year at this time I would have been telling you all about the exciting events and activities the Youth have to look forward to, both in Youth Group and Sunday School. Well, surprisingly things will be different this year! This first issue can be thought of as "Pandemic Youth Group for Dummies." There are several articles below that detail what Youth Formation will look like in the coming school year. Through much of last year, Youth Group attendance was through the roof! An average Monday night would see twenty-plus 6th through 12th graders hanging out, laughing and learning for two hours. Well, those days are on pause. Instead, we are going to experiment! While the possibility exists for some limited in-person gatherings, they will be the exception, and I will use them sparingly for certain high-impact events. The bulk of Youth Formation will be on-line this year, much like all the schools in the County. The entire Youth Group got an intense education on Zoom and its possibilities and limitations this past spring. We learned a lot and are incorporating those lessons into our planning for the year. I "met" with some of our Youth Group veterans the other week to discuss ideas, and this issue's articles incorporate those ideas.

No one has a crystal ball (as far as I know), and there are challenges and risks to operating Youth Group virtually. However, my informal council of advisors and I are confident that this is a good and workable plan. I look forward to feedback, and I am always open to trying something new. I hope you will support this plan and continue to support our Youth program as we work through the coming challenges. I want you to think of this plan as our skeleton. We have a basic framework, but it will be up to each of us to put on the muscles.

THE PLAN...

- **Youth Group will meet virtually via Zoom.** Yes, there will be occasional in-person meetings, but most of our time will be online for at least the Fall Semester.
- **There will be THREE Youth Group meetings a week via Zoom, none to last more than one hour.** In the past, our meetings lasted a bit over two hours – three if you counted Monday

night dinner, too. That length of time is excellent when in-person but is insane in an on-line format. So, we restructure.

- The first will be for the **entire Youth Group** and we will meet at our old time of **7 o'clock Monday evenings**. One of the best things about our Youth Group is the community we have created. This sense of belonging has been critical to the program's success, and we all want to foster that. Monday nights will be primarily about Fellowship; sharing what is happening in our lives, maybe a *short* lesson, and time to have some fun with the games we have collected for on-line use.

*A very special note about our first Monday night meeting, which will be on **14 September**. This meeting will be especially **focused on our newest members!** We have a new crop of middle-schoolers to integrate into our group. Some of our High School students will join us that night to share our group norms and traditions and introduce them to our community's culture. This way, when the entire group gets together on the 21st, things won't seem strange to our newest members, and they will feel welcomed.

- The other two meetings will break out by grade –**Middle School on Wednesday evenings and the High Schoolers on Thursdays**. Both meetings will also begin at **7pm** and last for one hour. This allows me to work on lessons in smaller, more easily managed groups, and to tailor the content more to age. I resisted this division when we met in-person because I find the younger members especially benefit from the interaction with the older students, and it provides the older students with some informal leadership opportunities. Zoom makes that more of a challenge, but the idea is that one or two of the high school students will join in with the Middle School group when they meet. Coupled with the whole group getting together on Monday nights, I hope this provides a reasonable facsimile of our previous format and fosters a sense of inclusiveness.
- **The meeting for High School students will have a slightly different flavor.** Having worked with this age group now for over 15 years as both a Sunday School teacher and as Youth Leader, I have discovered some things about their Formation. In the best of times it is a challenge to get them to Sunday School. In the best of times, it is difficult to get them to want to focus on something that seems like just more academics –another lecture that goes in one ear and out the other. What I have found works best is when the topic interests them, and that means giving them wide latitude in the direction of our discussions. They engage the most when they feel they are integral to the topic, and not just an audience. Another important lesson learned about this age group is time. They don't have enough of it, and they treasure and guard their down time. In this, I am their complete ally. They are young adults and should have a say in how they manage their time. This is the time to learn that important skill, and they do that by making some of their own choices.

With all of this in mind, I want to try something radical with the High School. **We are going to combine High School Sunday School and High School Youth Group. And, we are not going to meet on Sunday mornings. {GASP!!!!!!}** I know, I can hear you. Just breathe. I think this will work. We are going to substitute a rolling, moderated discussion for a regular class time. Using Google Classroom, with which most of our students are already very familiar, we will replicate our wide-ranging discussions. The beauty of this idea is that the students can participate as they have the time. Everyone will be able to easily “hear” each other and will have more time to reflect on what they read and what they write. And, students who were not regular Sunday School goers in the past might find it easier to participate. In fact, since we are using the same platform as they use in school, we might get a little increased participation as they finish up schoolwork. Fingers crossed! (A personal philosophy note: I have always seen Sunday School and Youth Group as two sides of the same coin. One is more classroom learning and one is more practical application of what they learn).

- **In-Person Gatherings?** Okay, but what about things like Night Watch, and lock-ins, and service trips? Short answer: I don’t know yet. I am going to be paying very close attention to try and identify when it is safe and essential that we gather in-person. I take my cues from the County, the State and the Diocese, using science and common sense. As the situation permits and opportunities present themselves, we will look closely at what is possible. Nothing can truly substitute for in-person gatherings, but nothing is more important to me than the safety and health of our students.

VIRTUAL YOUTH GROUP – WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Some of you are new to our Group and would have been learning our Group’s traditions and norms this year like all newcomers. But even ‘veterans’ of the program are going to have to make some adjustments this year. Below are the mechanics for how Virtual Youth Group will operate for the fall semester.

- As a reminder, the weekly YG schedule is:
 - Monday evenings at 7 pm: the entire Group for sharing and fellowship.
 - Wednesday evenings at 7 pm: Middle School Youth Group.
 - Thursday evenings at 7 pm: High School Combined Youth Group & Sunday School
- Primarily for security purposes I do not publish standing Zoom meetings. A few minutes before 7 pm on the nights we meet, you will receive an email from me with the link for the meeting that night. Click on the link, fill in the code when prompted, and you are in!

- Monday evenings will be primarily for sharing and fellowship. However, we *will* still start every meeting with our Highs & Lows. The trick will be to keep them short and sweet, as we will have limited time. Meetings will last no more than one hour
- Wednesdays (Middle School) and Thursdays (High School) will be for targeted lessons and projects.
- There will be a Youth-led closing prayer each evening. I will be picking the person to pray to give everyone the opportunity to become comfortable with public prayer.

HOW WE WILL BEHAVE. I am the emcee for our meetings. Unless I call on you, I really need everyone to stay chill and quiet. Think of it like having a virtual "talking stick." I will hand it to you and then it comes right back to me - understand? I promise we will keep it light. But, this is our chance to share, and that is very difficult if we all share at once.

CURRICULUM QUESTIONS ANSWERED

What is the YG doing this year?

There are three themes for this year. The first couple of them are recurring themes. I hit them every year because a) we always have new people, and b) repetition is important for retention. They are General Church Knowledge and Confirmation Preparation. The third is the topic I plan to work on throughout the school year. This year we are going to be discussing

- **General Church Knowledge.** Under this topic I consider things like understanding what we believe as Christians commonly and Episcopalians specifically. To do this, we go directly to the Bible and to the Book of Common Prayer (BCP). We examine the stories, we read critically, and look for the lessons we can apply in our lives. We use the BCP to help us understand our Episcopalian heritage, and to untangle what is happening during various services. It also serves as our planning guide for Youth-led services. As an example of the kinds of things we do is our Nicene Creed dissection. Everyone does this each year since our thoughts and understandings evolve each year, too. Each student is given a copy of the Creed and told to highlight in one color words or phrases which they do not understand. In another color they highlight things that they struggle to believe. The results provide an excellent roadmap for our lessons the rest of the year.
- **Confirmation Preparation.** Last year we were totally thrown off track by the pandemic. This year I still don't have any idea when the Bishop will feel comfortable having Confirmation. However, for those interested, we will make sure you are ready to take the consequential step of Confirmation. It is consequential because when you take this mature and independent step, you stand before God, the congregation, and the Bishop, and state with conviction that you are confirming your belief in the gift of Baptism you received when younger. Peter+ and Patti+ and I have discussed our possible Confirmation approaches for quite some time. We take a holistic approach, and not one based necessarily on an age or grade. While the regular Youth Group lessons we work through provide a good foundation for Confirmation, there is a deeper dive that candidates should take into some of the topics. I use a program called My Faith, My Life; A Teen's Guide to the Episcopal Church, by Jenifer Gamber, as the basic framework for many of the

discussions. We are not following it by rote; rather we use it as a roadmap, but we aren't afraid of interesting detours!

Please let me know if you are interested in taking this important step.

- Finally, as far as a general theme for the year, last year several parishioners and I were in conversation about tackling the subject of **racism** again for this coming year. Well, it seems the entire nation is confronting that topic right now. We are not going to shy away from it. I know this is a sensitive topic. I know this is a subject that can inflame passions. We are going to focus on what, as Christians, we should be thinking, saying, and doing about racial injustice. I had several small 'field trips' in the works which I hope we will eventually be able to go on. Regardless, there is plenty to discuss and think about.

WHAT IS THE EPISCOPAL YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM?

YLP is a Diocesan program made by invitation to those youth who have shown leadership qualities in their home parishes, and it is limited to High School students. In the past, like everything else, we did this in person. This year, for at least the fall semester, we will do it on Zoom (sorry!) The schedule right now is to meet Tuesday afternoons from 4:30-6 (see the schedule below).

This program is meant to encourage youth to be bigger parts of their churches and communities through Bible study, proven leadership skill building, and fellowship. This program is life changing and youth affirming. Each meeting is mentored by at least two adults and led by one team-selected young person for that year. This year, the four broad areas we will tackle in the fall semester are:

- Bible Study: Revelations
- Leadership:
- United States Church History: Colonization/Great Awakening
- Self-Care/Games: Meditations etc.

Once again, I am one of the adult mentors this year. I know every single one of you High School students would excel and benefit from this program. Please email me with any questions!

Diocesan Youth Leadership Program Schedule

All meetings held on Zoom from 4:30 until 6 pm

<u>DATE</u>	<u>TOPIC</u>
9/ 15	Icebreakers
9/22	Leadership
9/29	Bible Study
10/ 6	Church History
10/13	Self-Care
10/20	Leadership

10/27	Bible Study
11/3	Church History
11/10	Self-Care
11/17	Leadership
12/1	Bible Study
12/8	Church History
12/15	Wrap Up

OUR SUMMER SERVICE TRIP/PILGRIMAGE

– TAKE TWO!

We got robbed this summer of our service trip & pilgrimage. I am PRAYING that things are back to our (new?) normal for this coming summer. So, even though we are talking about an event in July (most probably), I want you to start thinking and dreaming! Most of the planning is done. Now we have a whole year to really fine-tune things. So, for those of you who are new, or may have forgotten, here is the info as things stand right now.

Get Excited.



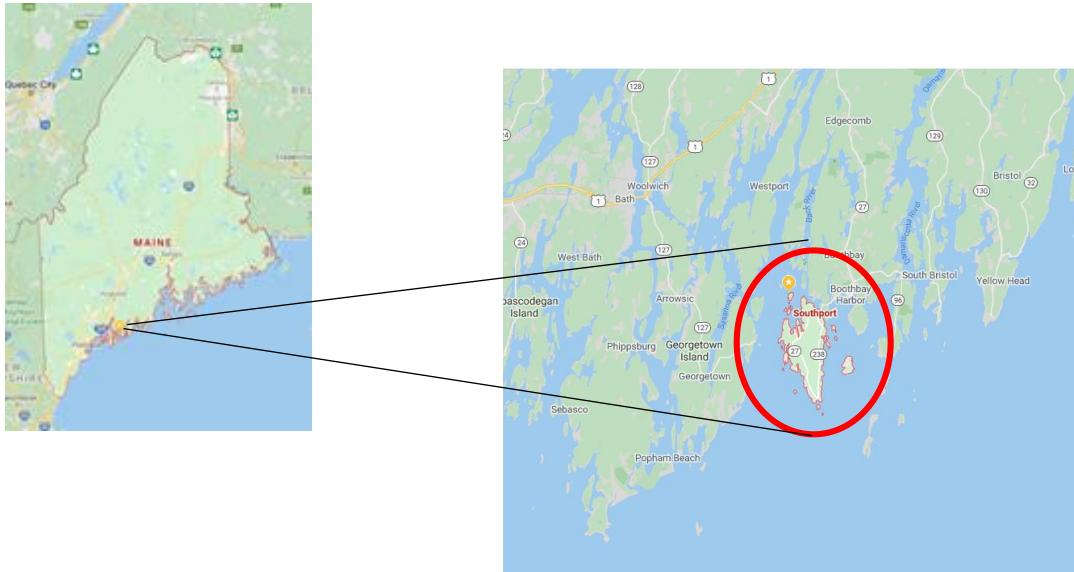
THE BASICS

PURPOSE: Service, environmental stewardship, learning to see beyond the façade a new place may present, forging deeper connections with God and each other.

WHEN: We will have to watch the calendar and the public health situation closely, but most likely early July. I will be coordinating with the Diocese so as to not conflict as much as possible with camps, EYE, etc.

COST: TBD, but I expect and am planning to keep the individual cost below \$400.00. NOTE: Due to a number of factors, both logistical and related to infrastructure, we are limited to **15** pilgrims total!

WHERE: Southport, ME, and environs



Back in 2014 we did a similar trip, and it was quite a success. Here is the pitch. It's a bit long. I'll wait while you get a cup of tea and settle in.

Ready? Okay.

We will travel from St. Margaret's on (TBD). We will travel Monday to Monday to allow us the opportunity to worship on Sunday with the residents of the town. We will depart quite early Monday morning and it will be a full travel day, so dress comfortably! I expect us to be home by 8 PM on the following Monday.

Tuesday will focus on settling into our surroundings, learning what it takes to live in a delicate environment in a way respectful of God's creation, and some exploration. Two days will be taken up with service. There are several interesting and important projects. One day will be an off-Island day for seeing some of the surrounding areas, and we will use the remaining time for exploration of our island home, fun, reflection and worship.



So, what are our surroundings? We are going to be "roughing" it a bit on a private, 24-acre island off the coast of Maine (the name is Boston Island, and it does show up on Google Maps). Here is what roughing it means. We have access to a house with a kitchen for all cooking, dining, meetings, games during some down time, etc. However, due to space limitations, we will be sleeping outside on the lawn in tents – unless we have some bad weather, and then we'll all cram in together!

The Island has no electricity or running water, and yet people have been spending very comfortable summers out there for over 140 years without any complaint! What this really means for us is that we will do things a little more slowly and a little more mindfully.

- Cooking. There is a gas grill, as well as a stove and oven. Additionally, there is a refrigerator – powered by propane! There really isn't anything you can make at home that we cannot

make there. Once our group is set, we will work on menu planning, and how we divide out the chores during our week together.

- Bathrooms. There are options! At the property on which we are staying there is both an outhouse (a two-holer no less!) and a composting toilet. Given that there is no running water, this means no septic system. With just a few people in residence, the outhouse and the composting toilet can keep pace with requirements. When we add in another 15 people, you quickly learn that the infrastructure is too delicate. We will be setting up a few portable stations for our use to lessen our impact.
- Showering. There is a lovely shower facility, but there is only room for one at a time, so, as with toilets, we will augment. And this leads nicely into a discussion of...
- WATER. No running water means every drop we use is either carefully captured and saved rainwater (all washing and cooking) or transported out from the mainland (all drinking water). When you consider that each gallon weighs 8 pounds, and that it does not rain every day, you quickly learn to conserve! We will have several hands-on lessons on water conservation in addition to many discussions about our “fragile island home.”
- Telephones. We can charge them, but there will be plenty of times when we will not need them. And *this* leads nicely into a discussion of...



EXPECTATIONS. You will be bathed in natural beauty. I am not kidding when I say that sunrises and sunsets will take your breath away, and the surroundings will fill you with the wonder of God’s creation. (In case you are wondering, Southport is where Rachael Carson did much of her work). But it also means you will not be sleeping in bed with an adjoining bath or have immediate access to electronics. We will be doing some work to assist members of a community

that is outwardly very wealthy, but perfectly illustrates the growing divide between the wealthy and those struggling to make their lives work. My expectations for you are that you will willingly and cheerfully follow the rules the leaders establish, be participatory in group activities, be willing to get dirty and tired a couple of days, and that you keep your eyes, ears and hearts open to the Holy Spirit, and BE PRESENT.

**IF YOU ARE INTERESTED PLEASE LET ME
KNOW ASAP!**

A RECURRING PLEA

I am always updating email and phone numbers for people. You would be surprised how often these things seem to change! Please make sure I have the email address(es) you prefer me to use, your grade, as well as emergency contact information, cell phones, *etc.* **THANKS!**

And now.....

THE HOLY HOTMAIL CALENDAR

(a.k.a. *The thing that makes this newsletter so ridiculously long!*)

- This calendar is keyed to the Anne Arundel County Public School calendar for the school year 2020-2021 (<https://www.aacps.org/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=6890&dataid=30871&FileName=BOE%20Approved%20202021%20CalendarRev.%2081020.pdf>). If there is no school on a particular day, there is no regularly scheduled Youth Group meetings.
 - Contrary to past calendars, this one will mostly only cover the fall semester due to uncertainties for the spring.
 -
- All meetings, unless otherwise noted, will be via Zoom. Links to the meetings are always sent out a few minutes before the actual meeting, so watch your email!

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Event:</u>
9/14	Youth Group Newcomers Meeting! 7 – 8 pm. Tonight is the chance for you to join the group, meet some new people maybe, learn our group norms and expectations, and generally get a feel for how things are run in Youth Group! If you are <i>NOT</i> a newcomer, you are still welcome to join us and help share your knowledge and experience!
9/15	Youth Leadership Program , 4:30-6 pm: Icebreakers
9/16	Middle School Youth Group Meeting , 7-8 pm
9/17	High School Youth Group/Sunday School Meeting , 7-8 pm
9/21	Youth Group-All Together Now! 7-8 pm
9/22	Youth Leadership Program , 4:30-6 pm: Leadership
9/23	Middle School Youth Group Meeting , 7-8 pm
9/24	High School Youth Group/Sunday School Meeting , 7-8 pm
9/28	NO Youth Group – schools closed
9/29	Youth Leadership Program , 4:30-6 pm: Bible Study
9/30	Middle School Youth Group Meeting , 7-8 pm
10/01	High School Youth Group/Sunday School Meeting , 7-8 pm
10/05	Youth Group-All Together Now! 7-8 pm
10/06	Youth Leadership Program , 4:30-6 pm: Church History

10/07 Middle School Youth Group Meeting, 7-8 pm

10/08 High School Youth Group/Sunday School Meeting, 7-8 pm

10/12 **NO** Youth Group – schools closed for parent/teacher conf.

10/13 Youth Leadership Program, 4:30-6 pm: Self-Care

10/14 Middle School Youth Group Meeting, 7-8 pm

10/15 High School Youth Group/Sunday School Meeting, 7-8 pm

10/19 Youth Group-All Together Now! 7-8 pm

10/20 Youth Leadership Program, 4:30-6 pm: Leadership

10/21 Middle School Youth Group Meeting, 7-8 pm

10/22 High School Youth Group/Sunday School Meeting, 7-8 pm

10/26 Youth Group-All Together Now! 7-8 pm HALLOWEEN PARTY!

10/27 Youth Leadership Program, 4:30-6 pm: Bible Study

10/28 Middle School Youth Group Meeting, 7-8 pm

10/29 High School Youth Group/Sunday School Meeting, 7-8 pm

11/02 Youth Group-All Together Now! 7-8 pm

11/03 Youth Leadership Program, 4:30-6 pm: Church History

11/04 Middle School Youth Group Meeting, 7-8 pm

11/05 High School Youth Group/Sunday School Meeting, 7-8 pm

11/09 Youth Group-All Together Now! 7-8 pm

11/10 Youth Leadership Program, 4:30-6 pm: Self-Care

11/11 Middle School Youth Group Meeting, 7-8 pm

11/12 High School Youth Group/Sunday School Meeting, 7-8 pm

11/16 Youth Group-All Together Now! 7-8 pm

11/17 Youth Leadership Program, 4:30-6 pm: Leadership

11/18 Middle School Youth Group Meeting, 7-8 pm

11/19 High School Youth Group/Sunday School Meeting, 7-8 pm

11/23 Youth Group-All Together Now! 7-8 pm

11/24 **NO** YLP – Thanksgiving Week

11/25 **NO** Middle School Youth Group Meeting

11/26 **NO** High School Youth Group /Sunday School Meeting



11/30 **Youth Group-All Together Now! 7-8 pm**

12/01 **Youth Leadership Program, 4:30-6 pm: Bible Study**

12/03 **Middle School Youth Group Meeting, 7-8 pm**

12/04 **High School Youth Group/Sunday School Meeting, 7-8 pm**

12/07 **Youth Group-All Together Now! 7-8 pm**

12/08 **Youth Leadership Program, 4:30-6 pm: Church History**

12/09 **Middle School Youth Group Meeting, 7-8 pm**

12/10 **High School Youth Group/Sunday School Meeting, 7-8 pm**

12/14 **Youth Group-All Together Now!, 7-8 pm**

12/15 **Youth Leadership Program, 4:30-6 pm: Wrap Up**

12/16 **Middle School Youth Group Meeting, 7-8 pm**

12/17 **High School Youth Group/Sunday School Meeting, 7-8 pm**

12/21 **Youth Group-All Together Now! 7-8 pm **CHRISTMAS PARTY!!!!****



And now, as always, because you made it this far...

ALTHOUGH INITIALLY EXCITED ABOUT THE POSSIBILITIES OF E-MAIL, GOD LOST INTEREST WHEN HE DISCOVERED SOMEONE WAS ALREADY USING HIS FAVORITE SCREEN NAME.



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(Since we are all online, I went with a tech joke. I crack myself up!)

Oh yeah, one more thing. Somewhere in this newsletter there might be a spelling and/or grammar error. I proof these pretty carefully, but things do slip by on occasion. If you find one, text me at 410-507-9370 (and now you have my cell number). If you are one of the first three to correctly identify an error, you will win a prize!