

In 2005, young communicators from the LWF member churches gathered in Lyon, France for a working consultation on communication. At the end of the hands-on event each participant agreed to a three-year communication project in their home church. They continue to meet with project supervisors from North America and with regular contact with communications staff in Geneva. Participants from the North America Region are:

Daranne Mills, ELCIC  
Lisa Smith, ELCA  
Meghan Johnston Aelebouni, ELCA

Following are brief reports on their projects one year into the program.

**Report by:**  
**Rev. Meghan Johnston Aelabouni**

**Problem:** how to create better communication among young adult Lutherans (aged 18-30) in the North America Region who are relatively isolated from one another because of the large geographical distance; stronger communication within congregations than between congregations or across the region; a scattering rather than a concentration of young adult Lutherans among congregations in the region; an institutional focus by our church bodies on providing resources for youth (ages 18-22) rather than young adults (ages 18-30).

**Possible Solutions:** Utilize communication technologies most accessible to members of the N.A. region (web technologies) to bridge large distances; bring young adults face to face to build communication connections through relationship building.

**Starting Project objective:** To create, in partnership with other young adults from my region, a forum in which relationships can be built in order to create and enhance communication networks between young adults in the N.A. Lutheran church bodies.

**Process:** I began by contacting young adult Lutherans I knew, to ask what issues they felt our age group was facing in the church. I heard considerable passion and interest from fellow young Lutherans in the ELCA around the issue of being a young adult in the church. We wondered why are we, at our age, invested in the ELCA and in the worldwide Lutheran Christian church; who were we, and how could we meet each other; and how do we now envision the future church we will lead – where and how do we believe God is calling the North American Lutheran church to go from here?

Over a period of months, through these conversations, I identified a group of interested Lutheran (and some non-Lutheran) young adults, who felt themselves to be double minorities (both a minority within a predominantly older church and a minority in the predominantly non-churchgoing generation in the U.S. American context.)

From these conversations came the following insights:

1. Why are we, at our age, invested in the ELCA and in the worldwide Lutheran church? We began with our own stories of our relationships to the church. Most of us determined that our relationship to the church had something to do with our vocation: we were employed by the church either as parish pastors or lay workers, within individual congregations, synods, or the churchwide office in Chicago. Others had spouses who were employed by the church. For many of us, being called into leadership in the church significantly influenced the level and nature of our commitment. It also affected this involvement in that our livelihood is dependent on the church, both empowering us and limiting us in speaking an authoritative word to and about the church.

2. Who are we and how could we meet each other?

Those in the conversation group were Lutherans and a Buddhist guest in the Chicago area; male and female, married and single, Caucasian and of African, Middle Eastern, and Native American descent, and predominantly heterosexual. Much of our conversation included question of how to broaden the scope of these conversations to include other young adults, particularly those whom we did not yet know.

Obstacles: Many of us spoke of being the only, or one of the few young adults in her or his congregation. How would we find and invite others? Communication networks were more easily created among young pastors than lay workers. We realized that we did not all have the same needs. For example, one member did not feel a lack of connection to other young adult Lutherans but rather to other African-American Lutherans. A lack of funding for a conference, added to young adults' limited budgets and time constraints, would make planning a conference difficult. Finally, we discussed how to make such a gathering inclusive, but explicitly offered by young adults for ourselves.

3. How do we now envision the future church we will lead – where and how do we believe God is calling the North American Lutheran church to go from here?

We recognized diversity among ourselves, in terms of life stages, needs and passions. Within the young adult demographic, we identified passions and vocations as diverse as interfaith and ecumenical dialogue, parish ministry, international relationships, global as well as regional peace and justice issues, ethnic specific communities within the U.S., gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender ministry and others. Our hope is that bringing young adult Lutherans together for communication around shared areas of passion could help strengthen individuals and the work already being done in these areas by young adults.

**Current situation:**

A group of Lutheran young adults has formed and met twice for face-to-face conversation with more gatherings planned. Email communication between the group has also occurred, and a weblog has been constructed that will be offered by this group of ELCA young adults and open to all Lutheran young adults as a forum for communication. The blog group will expand via a grass roots method as participants are invited to link to the blog, send it to others and join the contributing team. The Chicago group will continue to meet. The focus of the project will remain two-fold: to gather and

nurture young adult Lutherans through face-to-face conversation and to build empowering networks of young adults around issues of common concern for the purpose of action for the sake of the Gospel.

**Report by:**  
**Daranne Mills (ELCIC)**

**Goal:** To be a clearinghouse for faith-based advocacy and social responsibility at a grassroots level by informing (education materials), exchanging (ideas and questions) and doing action (decision-making, letter writing, etc.)

**Background:**

The idea for the project was born from my own interest in exploring how our faith informs one's call to social action. I want to equip other people of faith to explore this call by creating a concentration of information and resources, a starting point they could use as a jumping off point for education and action in their own lives.

This is an attempt not to re-invent the wheel, but rather build on some already amazing resources and make them easily accessible to a new user.

**Target Audience:** People with an interest in doing something to make the world a better place, but who are not exactly sure why or how to go about doing this. The project is not limited to, but will include resources for action and advocacy in a Canadian context.

**Implementation:**

Content

Why as people of faith are we called to social responsibility?

Thematic resources are poverty, HIV/AIDS/ Human Rights and the Environment

Design

A young Lutheran artist is working with me in the preliminary stages of exploring thematic design options that will work for web-based delivery.

Technical

Web-based

**Next Steps:**

Clarify structure/fit/relationship with ELCIC public life and communications plans

Facilitate web links that people need to find the information

Refine content – what are people needing that they can not find?

**Report by:**  
**Rev. Lisa Smith - ELCA**

Communication means knowing the context. As a parish pastor in Anchorage, Alaska, I am a student of young adult culture and lifestyle. The more I listen, the better I can encourage sustainable ministry among young adults. My project for the LWF young adult communication project is developing and implementing young adult ministry strategies for young adults in my congregation. Simply put: I am getting to know who they are and how to communicate the gospel to them.

The first step in such knowing is listening. I have held 1:1 meetings with young adults, spent time in local hang-outs, read books and articles on young adult ministry and attended a young adult ministry conference with two 20-something women in my congregation. Through listening and research, I have decided to focus on the small core group of young adults in my congregation, build up that base and work with them to reach out to marginalized young adults with some church connections. Someday, I dream of reaching to those who have never heard, using the strength and connectedness of a core group.

This kind of ministry is elusive as rap lyrics and moves faster than wi-fi. Still, I have learned some general principles on young adults' experiences with church and faith. Many feel there is no place for young adults in churches, especially single ones. Some come looking for a place to connect faith and life and find non-denominational churches lacking depth. Others just want to be cared for and asked deeper questions than "Have you found a job?" or "Are you dating anyone yet?"

My specific ministry goals include on-going "unstructured" hang-out times with young adults, many of which happen already. These include movies, dinner, rock-climbing and fishing (I know my Alaskan context!) We are also starting a Thursday evening worship that will be contemplative and focus sermons on young adult issues and concerns. Finally, it is time to step deeper into the Internet realities of young adults. I plan to start a blog about life, faith, culture. The blog will also keep young adults at Central connected socially. This plan is a beginning. I look forward to seeing where God calls young adults at Central Lutheran.