

Reflections on Themes from G2K Case Studies

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In March of 2000, the Department for Research and Evaluation (DRE), in consultation with the Youth Ministries/Gathering Team, selected four congregations to participate in a case study evaluation. This qualitative approach has given us the opportunity to address what the *impact* the youth gathering has on *congregational youth ministry*. DRE facilitated focus groups at each of the congregations prior to the youth gathering and spent time with each of the groups at the gathering. The following reflections and themes were found in the four case studies:

◆ *Experiential process*

The four case studies reflect that youth participated in G2K as an experiential process. When asked what parts of the G2K program had the biggest impact on their lives, youth often shared stories about specific experiences they had at the gathering. Some of these common experiences include: meeting new friends, volunteering with others in various social service settings, playing in the Beat with new and old friends, and being together in mass gathering events. The interactive opportunities made the gathering an experiential process.

◆ *Adult leadership*

The four case studies reflect the influence and impact of adult leadership among the youth in the church. Adult leaders tend to make the general decisions about what opportunities will be provided to the group. This raises the issue of power. Adult leadership provides the opportunities for youth to experience the church. For example, adult youth ministry leaders decide if their congregational youth have the access to attend the youth gathering. The invitation to attend the youth gathering initially passes through the hands of youth directors, leaders, or pastors, prior to youth having the option to attend the gathering. Furthermore, adult leadership sets the tone for their youth to experience the gathering. If congregational youth leaders are vested in the gathering as a life-changing experience, then in effect, their youth will anticipate the gathering as a life-changing experience. On the other hand, if youth leaders come to the gathering with uncertain expectations, their youth will also come to the gathering with uncertain expectations.

◆ *Tradition*

All four congregations valued their own traditional youth ministry events, such as annual servant events, summer camps, summer choir tours, etc. . In three of the four case studies, congregations were committed to doing other summer youth events that had been successful in previous years. The national youth gathering was a new experience for these congregations that youth directors were willing to try, but were more invested in their annual, traditional events that had been done in previous summers. On the other hand, one of the four congregations had an adult leader who had an extensive history with previous youth gatherings at the national and regional levels. Attendance at the national youth gathering was part of this congregation's tradition.

◆ *Relationships*

In the four case studies, there is a powerful impact of the “relationship aspect” of G2K. Regardless of the program content, youth in all four case studies raised the issues of acceptance and relationships. Youth resonated with the daily theme “There is a place for me” throughout the gathering. The majority of youth came to the gathering with friends and mentors (namely their youth directors or leaders) and valued new friendships and relationships that emerged during the week of G2K. Many youth commented that the gathering was a unique experience that was “so cool” because there were so many Lutheran youth hanging out together, where everyone was accepted.

◆ *Renewal*

When asked what youth were going to “take home” from G2K, many expressed a sense of renewal. Faith formation and rejuvenation were often mentioned. Common themes included: trying harder, participating in more church-related activities, sharing the word of God, taking more risks, becoming a Lutheran pastor, and forming a better relationship with God. This sense of renewal was common among all the youth who shared what they would “do” after G2K.