We greatly underestimate the young church. An acceptable conversation between adults about their teenage children frequently ends with something like, "I hope you make it through these next few years alive!" Somehow our culture thinks it’s okay to assume that teenagers are the most troubling members of society. But my greatest learning from YTM is that teenagers are incredibly smart and incredibly capable.

At the YTM Summer Institute last summer, three youth (Sam Kinzel, Felipe Vazquez, and Caitlyn Shipp) gave challenge talks at our Sunday Mass. The point of the talk was to challenge the YTM community to keep growing during the second week of YTM. All three youth were incredible, inspiring, and so very smart.

Caitlyn Shipp challenged the YTM community to make their lives a living prayer. She observed:

There are many different types of prayer; such as journaling, Visio Divina, Ignatian Contemplation, and Lectio Divina to name a few. But I soon realized there was more to prayer then these. When I opened my eyes to see God around me, I saw prayer come to life in the smallest of things. When walking to Pengl, I listened to our footsteps walking out of sync; it was God’s natural song. Each of us independent from the other, but together. When a camper moves the tables so we can all eat together; a prayer for unity. When a camper speaks out for the injustices of the world in table talks or in class; a prayer for change…

How many adults believe teens have the gifts to inspire faith in the whole church? I do. We placed a video of Caitlyn’s talk on the YTM website (http://tinyurl.com/caitlynYTM), which I encourage you to watch. Your faith may be inspired by her words and you may find yourself reconsidering your assumptions about teens.

Finally, on behalf of the entire YTM community, I want to thank Jessie Johnson for her outstanding service as YTM Coordinator over these last three and half years. We pray that God will continue to richly bless you in your new ministry.

Every year, a new group of young people walk away from YTM knowing they are part of a beloved community of Christian disciples. Over the six years that I have been a part of the Summer Institute (three as a counselor from 2007-09, and three as the program’s coordinator from 2013-present), I have experienced firsthand the love that binds the YTM community together as a family of faith. I have also found the YTM community to be a place where young people can ask and explore their deep questions—the things that really matter to them, that affect people they care about, that often resist easy answers—without fear of judgment or rejection.

To that end, we developed a new initiative for the 2016 Summer Institute called “Table Talk.” Several youth and counselors gathered at four points throughout the Institute (giving up their free time!) to talk about questions and topics facing our church and society—racism, sexism, the role of young people in the church, and LGBT issues. The latter two topics were chosen by YTM youth, who also led those conversations.

During Table Talk, we wrestled with what it means to listen deeply, reflect thoughtfully, and disagree respectfully. We reflected together on what wisdom our faith might offer in the midst of the challenges at hand. We practiced strategies for how to engage difficult conversations and topics after YTM. In our current political climate—where polarities are seen as threats and defensiveness is the norm—Table Talk was a refreshing reminder that we can do better.

We can listen more. We can model respect and friendship and authentic community. And the young church is leading the way.

Sitting under the Abbey Bell Banner with these young people, I was struck with a deep sense of gratitude for the gift that YTM has been to me. As my time as YTM Coordinator comes to an end, I want to express what a privilege it has been to make this discipleship journey with you. This community is a source of profound hope for me, and I am so, so grateful for your authentic witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thank you!
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Alumni Milestones

Marriages

Katie Winbauer (Youth ’11-’12) to Andrew Nelson, June 2016

Births

Megan Rodriguez (Kelsey; Counselor ’10-’11, MA Cohort ’12-present) and Bryan Rodriguez, boy, Francis, April 2016

Amanda Rademacher (Douvier; Youth ’00-’01, Counselor ’02-’03) and Karl Rademacher, boy, Wyatt, March 2016

Graduations

Katie Prokosch (Vogl; Youth ’08-’09, Counselor ’11-’13) graduated from Boston College’s School of Theology and Ministry with a Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry in August 2016.

Molly Minnerath (Youth ’10-’11) graduated from the College of Saint Benedict with a Bachelor’s degree in Theology, Hispanic studies, and Latino/Latin American studies in May 2016. She is currently volunteering for a year with the Maryknoll Bolivia Mission Immersion program in Cochabamba, Bolivia.

Share Your Milestones...

Submit them on the Alumni page at www.ytm-sju.org or email ytm@csbsju.edu