

## Youth Ministry Report - 2010

First and foremost, it must be acknowledged that the dedication that Jason, James, and Jeremy Chan, Eileen Kantel and Elizabeth Irwin all showed was beyond outstanding; they played central roles this past year. Of course it should be mentioned that each of these individuals have been giving to the Youth Ministry for many years now. Their continued and steady commitment, kindness, strength, intelligence, leadership skills and deep compassion have been a rich gift indeed. With genuineness and fierceness these three navigated and upheld the Youth Group through much of this past year. Their presence is one that allows the youth feel comfortable and at home almost immediately. Never have I seen such true passion and love demonstrated, and the word “thank you” is simply not enough.

The Youth Group saw many changes come about during 2010. Most notably, many young people have moved on to become young adults, while a new wave of youth began their transition in joining us. There were a few farewells that touched the Youth Ministry in particular. Elizabeth Irwin was a leader for the Youth Group for quite a few years, and dedicated herself so thoroughly to the task. Adam Irwin’s sense of humor was a light to the Youth Group for many years, as well as his strong desire to learn more about helping those around him. Caitlin Irwin was a constant source of joy. She was also rigorously genuine in everything that she said or did, always speaking her mind and always questioning. We all shared many laughs over many meals and nights together. Eileen Kantel had an amazing opportunity presented to her that she was brave enough to accept, and so Eileen adventured to Vancouver. Her creativity and ability to see problems from different angles proved invaluable to the Youth Ministry on many occasions. Eileen also brings a presence of excitement and love wherever she goes, and this benefited all of those around her.

While it is important to acknowledge how these people had (and continue to have) a profound effect on our lives and that we miss them; we know that a natural part of growing involves farewells. I use the word farewell instead of goodbye, because we know that we will share time together again. We want the Youth Group to provide a space where everyone feels accepted and genuinely loved, because these ingredients encourage growth. People learn to fly when they have a safe place to land should they need it. Although we miss many of the youth who have moved on, this growth is exactly what we desire for them to experience.

The Sunday morning Youth Ministry known as SMYCH has also experienced many changes throughout the past year. With the ebb and flow of ages and levels of maturity, we steered away from more mature topics that were appropriate for older adolescence, towards more basic or foundational ones. Rob Bell, a pastor and speaker, created a series of videos called “NOOMA” (breath) geared towards people fascinated by Jesus, but who could not figure out or identify with the traditional “standard Christian packaging”. We thought this would be a wonderful place to start with a group of young adolescents, wondering if the religion of their parents and childhood has any place in the lives they are starting to create for themselves. After NOOMA we spent time trying to get comfortable with the idea (and the risk!) of sharing honestly with each other, even if we disagree. In fact, especially if we disagree. The book “I was Just Wondering” by Philip Yancey, a book mostly filled with lots of questions (and not a whole lot of answers) was the main inspiration behind the autumn months of 2010. Before delving into more mature or specific topics, I felt that it was important to spend time really exploring the idea that in building a mature faith of your own, honesty is more important than pretending to agree if you don’t. The adolescent years introduce more choices and more space for shaping their own opinions and ideas of how they see the world. Asking questions isn’t “bad”; it means you are taking responsibility for your own understanding. By examining some of the issues that Philip Yancey has had to work through regarding his own walk of faith, I hoped that this would help normalize that working through doubt is part of solidifying and

developing an intimate faith. Also, that building your faith is a process that develops and unfolds slowly over time.

Building autonomy and a sense of self are important developmental needs during the adolescent years. Not wanting to be told or fed what to do anymore is a very healthy part of figuring out who you want to be, who you are, and who you are not. In the face of the raw jungle known as Secondary School, peer pressure and peer groups can make the process of defining yourself tumultuous. With that in mind, the direction that SMYCH will be taking in early 2011 is the importance of having healthy boundaries. Boundaries function as a property line that shows us what we are responsible for and what we are not. Healthy boundaries give us the freedom to have our own thoughts and opinions, help us deal and acknowledge our own feelings, while allowing us to disengage from manipulative or harmful emotions of others. We will be following the Boundaries bible study by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend, with the hope of teaching youth that boundaries give us the freedom to be the loving, giving, and fulfilled individuals God gives us to be.

Friday night Youth Group continues to try and include a mix of big organized games, and more intimate “hang-out” type of nights. We **always** welcome ideas or feedback, whether a member of Youth Group or not. It’s been difficult to try and find a specific night of the week that fits enough peoples’ schedules for bible studies, and so soon we will be introducing something different. We will be starting mini-retreats in the Rectory; from Saturday evening to Sunday afternoon. This is still a relatively new idea, but our first group will be geared towards female older adolescents and will attempt to have these nights once every two months. Having the groups for a limited and targeted population will allow for a program to be tailored much more closely to their needs. More news will come, keep your eyes out in the bulletin!

The support that the Youth Ministry receives from the Saint Michaels is touching and humbling. I am truly joyful that I was invited to join your one of your Ministries this year, and look forward to the year to come.

Respectfully yours,

Jaclyn O’Connor