

# Voice of Grace

August, 2011

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## Why Youth Stay in Church When They Grow Up

Posted By [Jon Nielson](#) On July 29, 2011 @ 5:30 AM  
In [Commentary,Featured,Opinion](#) | 50 Comments

"What do we do about our kids?" The group of parents sat together in my office, wiping their eyes. I'm a high school pastor, but for once, they weren't talking about 16-year-olds drinking and partying. Each had a story to tell about a "good Christian" child, raised in their home and in our church, who had walked away from the faith during the college years. These children had come through our church's youth program, gone on short-term mission trips, and served in several different ministries during their teenage years. Now they didn't want anything to do with it anymore. And, somehow, these mothers' ideas for our church to send college students "care packages" during their freshman year to help them feel connected to the church didn't strike me as a solution with quite enough depth.

The daunting statistics <sup>[1]</sup> about churchgoing youth keep rolling in. Panic ensues. What are we doing wrong in our churches? In our youth ministries?

It's hard to sort through the various reports and find the real story. And there is no one easy solution for bringing all of those "lost" kids back into the church, other than continuing to pray for them and speaking the gospel into their lives. However, we can all look at the 20-somethings in our churches who *are* engaged and involved in ministry. What is it that sets apart the kids who *stay* in the church? Here are just a few observations I have made about such kids, with a few applications for those of us serving in youth ministry.

### 1. They are converted.

The apostle Paul, interestingly enough, doesn't use phrases like "nominal Christian" or "pretty good kid." The Bible doesn't seem to mess around with platitudes like: "Yeah, it's a shame he did that, but he's got a good heart." When we listen to the witness of Scripture, particularly on the topic of conversion, we find that there is very little wiggle room. Listen to these words: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). We youth pastors need to get back to understanding salvation as what it really is: a miracle that comes from the glorious power of God through the working of the Holy Spirit.

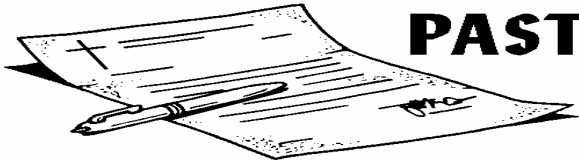
We need to stop talking about "good kids." We need to stop being pleased with attendance at youth group and fun retreats. We need to start getting on our knees and praying that the Holy Spirit will do miraculous saving work in the hearts of our students as the Word of God speaks to them. In short, we need to get back to a focus on conversion. How many of us are preaching to

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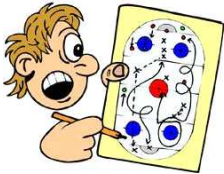
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# A Word from the PASTOR



## PLANS

Plans. We all make them. And if all goes according to plan we get a deep sense of satisfaction. We feel like we've accomplished something. We put our mind to a task and we achieved it. Plans.



But what happens when we make a plan and things don't go according to plan. Plans

change.

As a kid growing up I didn't really make plans. Does any kid? As I got into high school plans started to become a part of my life. I planned to go out for football. I started to plan out my high school education courses. I made plans to hang out with friends. I made plans to start dating a cute girl named Jenn. And then toward the end of my high school career I started to make plans for college. My 1st plan was to attend Fergus Falls Community College. Then I planned to go to Moorhead State University. I then planned to ask this cute girl to marry me. Then it was time to plan a wedding (well, I didn't do too much of the planning. I just smiled and nodded). It was then time to plan what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. My plan started off as being a structural engineer. That plan came to an end very quickly due to the horrible amount of homework that I did not want to do. So I re-planned and decided something more active should be in my plan. My new plan included something much more active; physical education. Yes, I became a gym teacher. And what a glorious plan that turned out to be. I absolutely loved this plan.

We then started planning the family. We didn't necessarily plan on half a dozen kids, but kids were definitely part of the plan.

But then something happened that wasn't a part of my plan. Seminary.

At this point in my life I had no plans to change what I was doing and pack up my family, moved to Fergus Falls, and start my training to change my plan. MY PLAN.

**Jeremiah 29:11**

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

My plans were not the same as God's plans. He knew the plans. He has the plan. He is the plan.

If I kept going according to my plans, this newsletter article would never have gotten written. If I kept going to according to my plans, I would still be in Grand Forks teaching kids the importance of a physically active lifestyle.

But God had different plans for me. And even though it was not easy to follow his plan I am so glad that I did. I am so glad that I got a call from Henry Weber, your church chairman, asking if I would consider starting a conversation that would change my plans.

It has been a wonderful thing to get to know many of you during this 1st month here at Grace. I enjoyed hearing about your faith journey and I look forward to getting to know and hearing about many more of your stories.

Jenn and I would like to thank all of you for making us feel so welcome at Grace. From the time we pulled into our driveway with the crew to help us unload the truck we have felt that this truly is God's plan for our life's.



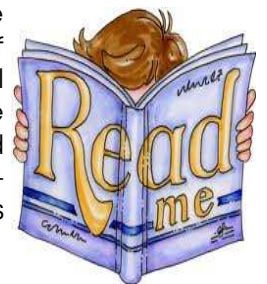
Plans are very important. We need to have plans. We need to follow through on these plans. But God's plans are even more important. What plan is God calling you to follow?

## LIBRARY NEWS

It is soon going to be fall. The air seems cooler already. The library has received several books over the summer and also received a lot of family movies. Please let me know who gave us all of those neat movies! I want to give you recognition on the return labels that will be placed on each one.

I will be processing the movies and the other books as soon as possible. Be looking for another listing of these movies and books real soon. Thanks to all who have given books, movies, and other items. We really appreciate all the contributions that you are willing to give.

Margaret Shaner



continued from page 1

unconverted evangelicals"? Youth pastors, we need to preach, teach, and talk—all the while praying fervently for the miraculous work of regeneration to occur in the hearts and souls of our students by the power of the Holy Spirit! When that happens—when the “old goes” and the “new comes”—it will not be iffy. We will not be dealing with a group of “nominal Christians.” We will be ready to teach, disciple, and equip a generation of future church leaders—“new creations”—who are hungry to know and speak God’s Word. It is converted students who go on to love Jesus and serve the church.

## **2. They have been equipped, not entertained.**

Recently we had “man day” with some of the guys in our youth group. We began with an hour of basketball at the local park, moved to an intense game of 16” (“Chicago Style”) softball, and finished the afternoon by gorging ourselves on meaty pizzas and 2-liters of soda. I am not against fun (or gross, depending on your opinion of the afternoon I just described) things in youth ministry. But youth pastors especially need to keep repeating the words of Ephesians 4:11-12 to themselves: “[Christ] gave . . . the teachers to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” Christ gives us—teachers—to the church, not for entertainment, encouragement, examples, or even friendship primarily. He gives us to the church to “equip” the saints to do gospel ministry, in order that the church of Christ may be built up.

If I have not equipped the students in my ministry to share the gospel, disciple a younger believer, and lead a Bible study, then I have not fulfilled my calling to them, no matter how good my sermons have been. We pray for conversion; that is all we can do, for it is entirely a gracious gift of God. But after conversion, it is our Christ-given duty to help fan into flame a faith that serves, leads, teaches, and grows. If our students leave high school without Bible-reading habits, Bible-study skills, and strong examples of discipleship and prayer, we have lost them. We have entertained, not equipped them . . . and it may indeed be time to panic!

Forget your youth programs for a second. Are we sending out from our ministries the kind of students who will show up to college in a different state, join a church, and begin doing the work of gospel ministry there without ever being asked? Are we equipping them to that end, or are we merely giving them a good time while they’re with

us? We don’t need youth group junkies; we need to be growing churchmen and churchwomen who are equipped to teach, lead, and serve. Put your youth ministry strategies aside as you look at that 16-year-old young man and ask: “How can I spend four years with this kid, helping him become the best church deacon and sixth-grade Sunday school class teacher he can be, ten years down the road?”

## **3. Their parents preached the gospel to them.**

As a youth pastor, I can’t do all this. All this equipping that I’m talking about is utterly beyond my limited capabilities. It is impossible for me to bring conversion, of course, but it is also impossible for me to have an equipping ministry that sends out vibrant churchmen and churchwomen if my ministry is not being reinforced tenfold in the students’ homes. The common thread that binds together almost every ministry-minded 20-something that I know is abundantly clear: a home where the gospel was not peripheral but absolutely central. The 20-somethings who are serving, leading, and driving the ministries at our church were kids whose parents made them go to church. They are kids whose parents punished them and held them accountable when they were rebellious. They are kids whose parents read the Bible around the dinner table every night. And they are kids whose parents were tough, but who ultimately operated from a framework of grace that held up the cross of Jesus as the basis for peace with God and forgiveness toward one another.

This is not a formula! Kids from wonderful gospel-centered homes leave the church; people from messed-up family backgrounds find eternal life in Jesus and have beautiful marriages and families. But it’s also not a crap-shoot. In general, children who are led in their faith during their growing-up years by parents who love Jesus vibrantly, serve their church actively, and saturate their home with the gospel completely, grow up to love Jesus and the church. The words of Proverbs 22:6 do not constitute a formula that is true 100 percent of the time, but they do provide us with a principle that comes from the gracious plan of God, the God who delights to see his gracious Word passed from generation to generation: “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”

Youth pastors, pray with all your might for true conversion; that is God’s work. Equip the saints for the work of the ministry; that is your work. Parents, preach the gospel and live the gospel for your children; our work depends on you.

# ELDER REPORT

## The Spiritual Parallel of Dog Days

The month of August and first part of September is often known as the "Dog Days of Summer". This name goes back to ancient Greek times when events and seasons were often tied to what the stargazers observed in astronomy. It is the hottest part of the year when the brightest star in the "Big Dog" (Canis Major) constellation rises at the same time or just before sunrise. This star called "Sirius" is, interestingly, where the satellite radio company got it's name.

What often happens during the hottest days of the year is that people become sluggish and lethargic. As most families made their living by farming and agriculture in those days, Dog Days occurred long after the crops were planted, but before the urgent work of fall harvest was under way. There wasn't much pressing work that needed to be done this time of year. And because of the heat, people often took a gladly welcomed break during this season. And even today, "dog days" are equated with little work getting done, idleness and laziness.

### So it begs the question . . . .

Does our spiritual life go through the same cycles?

Do we go through periods of planting, harvest, hibernation, even stagnation?

I would say, "Of course it does." In fact, some argue that our spiritual life should go through cycles of some kind. If our relationship with God doesn't change and evolve, then it doesn't grow.

Just as the crops of the fields need the time and the heat to grow and ripen, so does the radiant power of Christ work in our lives so that we can grow and mature in our walk with Him.

As growth is an important time in life . . . remember, it is a time that will pass. In fact, in our walk with Christ, it's important to take in the warmth and allow growth to take place. But the harvest is right around the corner.

*Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." Mark 4:26-29*

Any farmer will tell you that harvest is a time of lots of hard work. There will be times in your Christian life when it's necessary to step up to the plate and join in the work that needs doing. As we begin the fall season in our church, what fruit has God planted in you? How can God use your gifts to sow in His kingdom?

Think about it. Pray about it. Now's the time to step forward and join in the effort. Can you help teach Sunday School? Can you make goodies for the kids or adults? Would you like to invite someone new to church? Or if there's something on your heart that you'd like to do, please speak up.

God's waiting for you . . . but remember Dog Days are soon over and the work of His Kingdom begins.

Craig Schmidt, Elder

# TRUSTEE REPORT

The trustees are: Nadine Glur, Bruce Dyk, David Bartz, Nate Dahl, Lance Hill and Mark Marvel.

Our facilities are in good shape and required little maintenance over the summer. We have been blessed with donations enough to meet and exceed our expenditures. Thanks to all of you for your continued financial support.

A family whose home is threatened by the flood is living in the parsonage. Until they are able to move home and a decision is made about what to do with the parsonage, we will continue the fundraiser projects on the parsonage. We ask that you prayerfully consider supporting these projects.

The yard and parking lot have been sprayed for weeds. Thanks to Rob Feist for taking great care of mowing the lawn this year.



The carpets have been cleaned throughout the church. Thanks to Neil Toman for taking care of this.

We have signed a contract with Ken Weber to repair the sidewalks and the north entrance concrete. This should be completed by the end of October. These repairs will be covered by donations from the fundraiser project fund. Thanks to all who contributed.

The youth will be completing a beautification project this fall by planting a flowerbed around the sign on the west end of the property. Be sure to take notice of this in late August and let the kids know how much you appreciate their efforts.



Thank you for your continued support and please bring any problems or concerns to one of the trustees.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nadine Glur

# WOMEN'S EVENTS

There are several events planned for the months of August and September.

1. MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS SUPPER OUT at Johnny Carino's will be on Tuesday, August 23rd at 5:30 pm. Please RSVP to LouAnn by 4 pm that day at 400-2670. Let's see if we can beat our record of 31 last month. If you are a daughter or a mom you are welcome.
2. LouAnn will be teaching a picture centerpiece class on Saturday morning, September 24th in the church fellowship hall. We will begin at 10 am and have a potluck salad lunch at noon when we finish. You will need to bring 8 pictures, scissors, ruler, and 4 pieces of 12x12 cardstock to the class, (which you can buy at Hobby Lobby). There is an example on the counter in the church foyer. Anyone can do this—you should be 10 or older to make this. Talk to LouAnn if you have questions.



The Western District Regional meeting was held at Estes Park in Colorado. It was a beautiful place. The mountains were fantastic. It was a wonderful time of being in the Word and fellowshiping.

Pastor Craig Jennings from Bottineau was the speaker for the first evening and the first one to speak on Thursday morning. Later we had some of the Biennial business Meeting. Following That, the 5 regional pastors talked about their work. It was interesting to see how they know each other and are praying for each other.

Thursday evening and Friday morning Pastor Dr. Boe spoke on our General Culture and how it is affecting the church. We finished the business meeting in the morning. Debra Witkop spoke to both the Pastors Wives get together and the Ladies from the Western Region.

Our regional director Pastor Gary Witkop spoke Friday evening. He talked about how we have to go to the world outside of the church to reach the non-Christian people groups. We shouldn't expect them to come to us. After the service we each shared what our churches were doing and shared prayer concerns and blessings the churches have been having. It was a very moving time with lots of tears and also lots of praises. On Saturday morning we had Pastor Ron Erickson from the Williston Church speak and lead us in a Communion time. I missed having Pastor Al with me but it was an experience I will remember forever. Thanks for letting me attend this Convention!

Margaret Shaner

## YC11 Recap

### IT WAS A WOW!

Think about lots of laughter and rolling hills. Think about meaningful worship and majestic mountains. Think about dynamic speakers and gasping for air. Think about endless miles and amazing friendships. Think about blah food but beautiful scenery. Think about answered prayers and strengthened faith. These are all just a small part of what those of us who went to YC11 experienced.

Our group consisted of Aleah Dyk, Annah Belisle, Lexie Bader, Camille Ahlgren, Margaret Shaner, Tara Ness, Damon Ahlgren, Gerrit Dyk, Miranda Nickolauson, Hunter Glur, and Pastor Al. We road in two vehicles with Pastor Al and Camille driving and Margaret Shaner came as a delegate to the Western Region Biennial meeting.

Highlights of the trip included:

- Recreation at the Rushmore Water Park in Rapid City
- Visiting Mt. Rushmore National Monument
- Marvelous Rocky Mountains around Estes Park
- Amazing convention music by Remedy Drive (a contemporary Christian band)
- Kirk Militzer and Jay Price with marvelous morning and evening messages
- Ryan Nordlund's cool campfire music and wonderful worship music on closing day
- A killer mountain climb with a couple of begging youth
- Laughing 'till we hurt to the antics of Ken Davis
- Shopping in Estes Park
- Food and laughter, miles of travel and laughter, bonding relationships and laughter
- Tears and a big lump in the throat at the end

I could go on and on with highlights. Spiritually, the trip was a 10! Relationally, the trip was a 10! Esthetically, the trip was a 10! Regarding rest and relaxation, the trip was a 1! Who has

YC11 Recap continued...

time to rest when on a trip like this! It was the best group trip I have been on since 1999 when I went to the youth convention in Canada.

Do I have any regrets? Yes, I have one huge regret! I wish all the youth who didn't go had come along! They missed out on one of the best events of their lives!

Thanks to all our wonderful youth for such a wonderful trip! You have blessed me immensely! I love you all!

In Christ,  
Pastor Al



## SUNDAY SCHOOL REPORT

Preparations for Sunday School are underway. We are anticipating a great year of teaching, Bible memory, crafts, missions, and music. Our mission statement for Sunday School is to grow disciples of Jesus who know God, love God, and serve God. We know many of you highly value the ministry to the children of our church. Now is the time to put that concern and love into action. Several people have already stepped forward and offered to teach, but there is still room to include others. There are a number of ways to be involved. If you would like to help please talk to Roger or Nancy Larson. Nancy Larson, Sunday School Superintendent  
Roger Larson, Assistant



# SHINE NEWS

With picnics, water fights, pool parties, nursing homes, bowling, frofing, and bible studies Summer SHINE has been anything, but boring. The goal for SHINE has been to increase attendance and build relationships among the youth at Grace. In order to build these relationships, Tara took a large majority of the youth to lunch on an individual basis. She was able to discuss with the youth what they would like to see happen at SHINE and it gave her a new perspective through the eyes of each of the students. In the recent months, SHINE has consisted of one activity after another in the hopes of strengthening the youth's presence in the church. SHINE began the summer with a Backyard Fellowship at Hillside Park. Everyone in attendance had plenty to eat and plenty of games to choose from; it was a great opportunity for SHINE to become more active in the congregation.



The youth had a chance to gang up on Tara during SPLASH on June 26<sup>th</sup>, which successfully became a MASSIVE water fight. Senior High and Junior High Bible Study is now being held on Mondays at 7pm. We are doing a unit called *Discovering Yourself*, which focuses on parables from the gospel and relates them to the daily lives of the youth. It is important for the incoming 7<sup>th</sup> graders to feel welcome at youth group, so Tara



took them out for a night of bowling. A night at the Baptist Home tested the youth's singing abilities as they participated in Karaoke with 90-something year olds. This volunteer activity brought the youth out of their comfort zone



and was a learning experience for everyone. Some events to look for in August will include a SHINE Beautification Project. This will take place on Saturday, August 20<sup>th</sup> at 1 pm. The youth will work together to spruce up the area around the GLBC sign by planting a perennial garden. Girl's Night will be held on August 12 at Tara's apartment, which will be a GREAT opportunity for the girls of SHINE to grow closer and address difficult issues. A Root Beer Keg Party will be our last bash before going back to

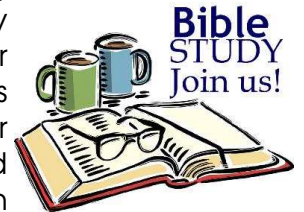


school and it will be held on August 21 at 8 pm. God has done some amazing things for SHINE this summer. It is evident that he is working for the good of the youth of Grace and I encourage the congregation to continue to pray for his blessings on SHINE. Please take some time to visit with a member of SHINE and get to know them, as well as to become more familiar with SHINE's activities.

Tara Ness, Youth Director

## TUESDAY LADIES BIBLE STUDY

Another summer is coming to an end it is and time to be thinking about our Bible Study Group. We finished our book last spring so it is time to get into another book. We meet 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays of each month from 7:00 – 9:00 pm. Deloris Alm has said she would host us again this year. Thanks so much, Deloris. We meet at 1607 South Portland Drive in Bismarck.



If you know of a good book to be doing please let me know. All ladies are invited to come. We do our study and then have prayer time and then enjoy fellowship time with a snack of some kind at the end. Please give me a call if you are interested in coming. We have had a wonderful time other years and hope to be blessed this year too. Come be fed with God's Word and great fellowship. My phone number is 426-0789.

Margaret Shaner, Leader

## ADVENTURE CLUB

Adventure Club will begin on Wednesday, September 14<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 pm. This is for ages 3 through grade 6. The directors this year will be Margaret Shaner and Andrea Darling. They are looking for people willing to provide snacks each week. If you can help with this, talk to Margaret.

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**FALL WEEKLY  
SCHEDULE**

**Sundays**

9:15 am—  
Sunday School  
10:30 am—  
Worship Service  
6:00 pm—Shine  
7:00 pm—  
Grace Groups

**Tuesdays**

6:15 am—  
Men's Bible Study  
9:30 am—  
PrimeTime Caffe

**Wednesdays**

6:30 pm—  
Adventure Club  
7:00 pm—  
Confirmation  
7:00 pm—Grace  
Groups

**SUNDAY SCHOOL RALLY DAY**

Sunday, September 11th  
Sunday School



9:15 am  
Morning Worship  
10:30 am  
Potluck Dinner  
11:45 am

Come and join us as  
we return to our  
Fall Schedule!

