



Youth Commission Report to
Diocesan Convention
November 14, 2009
Key West, Florida

Youth Commission President
Michael Sahdev

Hello, my name is Michael Sahdev and I am president of our Diocesan Youth Commission. Here with me today are our vice-president, Melanie Veizaga; secretary, Graceleen Garcia; and administrative assistant, Emily Gonzalez. Along with these Youth Commission officers there are countless other members of our Youth Commission back in their home parishes who are each proud to work and worship as members of the Diocese of Southeast Florida.

This past year our youth have taken extraordinary steps in reaching out and spreading Christ's message, not just to those here at home, but to those all over the world. The youth of our diocese have truly been engaged throughout the nation and beyond. Our passion for Christ in this diocese is inexhaustible and with God's grace we have spread His word through our actions both at home and on a national level.

The Youth Commission has grown so much in the past few years. We have grown from having a few youth attend meetings, to having our meetings packed with teens from throughout our diocese. In addition to our annual events, this year we strengthened our commitment to our Happening program; took what we have learned in that program and launched New Beginnings, a happening type program for middle school, sponsored by the Broward and South Dade deaneries; and participated in Faith in 3D, which was a national interdenominational program. We are definitely not a group that stands still!

We were leaders in our Province as well. We sent a delegation to the Provincial Network Meeting in Alabama; we were part of the design team for a provincial youth event also known as PYE, and we were part of the Official Youth Presence at General Convention for the third time in a row. Everyone knows when the Diocese of Southeast Florida arrives we bring our A-game!

At PYE last summer one of the national leaders of the event commented about our group, saying, "Is there anything that you all in South Florida can't do?" I humbly replied, "No Ma'am, there isn't!"

The Youth Commission sponsors certain events on an annual basis. We kicked off the year with our annual Christmas Ball held at St Andrews in Boca Raton. This event sets the tone for the year. Youth from around the diocese gather to make new friends and reconnect with old. The highlight last year was when we all got the chance to join in a once-in-a-lifetime conga line with Bishop Frade! Need I say more?

Soon after that, our youth attended Faith in 3D, which was held at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida. This was a nationwide gathering of youth from three denominations; the Presbyterian, Cooperative Baptist and Episcopal churches. The goal was to better understand our differences and celebrate the similarities of our denominations. Each day one denomination held the main service in their tradition. The highlight of the weekend was our service on Martin Luther King Day. When our procession came down the aisle to the sound of 25 drummers, with everyone in the hall doing an African chant and doves flying high in the air, any rumor that an Episcopal service would be dry and reserved was dispelled. The Cooperative Baptists and the Presbyterians will not soon forget us!

In March, we held our second Happening. This was especially exciting for us because we had worked so hard to bring this fabulous event back to our diocese. Our program is now established. We held our third Happening three weeks ago and it continues to be a life changing ministry for all the youth in our diocese.

Fresh from our success with Happening, when the Broward and South Dade deaneries decided to sponsor a Happening-type program for middle school, we were able to take all that we had learned by starting a major program and formed the team for New Beginnings. The program was a huge success, and we are grateful for the confidence that our leaders have displayed in us and proud that the youth of our diocese have the passion, as well as the ability, to take on huge projects in the name of Christ. The Youth Commission takes seriously the responsibility of building the next generation of Christian leaders for our church and the world.

Every spring we kick into high gear with our annual events. In April we held our annual Acolyte Festival. This year it was at St. Gregory's in Boca Raton. This is our largest event. The logistics are amazingly difficult, but once again it was a huge success. The Rev. Cori Olson reminded us in her sermon that acolytes serve God and our church at the most important times in the lives of our parishioners--baptism, marriage and funerals--in addition to our regular services. Acolytes are indispensable, and it is our honor to host this event each year.

In May, we held our Youth Convention in Ft. Lauderdale. Our theme was "Footprints in the Sand." We looked at what kind of legacy we were building both personally and as a group. We passed resolutions, which you will have the opportunity to vote on later today at this convention, and made plans for the upcoming year. One of the most important things we need is a permanent place to have our events. We are the only diocese in Province IV lacking a facility to call home. I know this diocese loves and supports its youth more than any other, but I am asking that we show it in the form of a youth facility that we can call our own.

Last summer many of us participated in PYE, our Province IV Youth Event that was held in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, and in the Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans. This was a mission trip to repair homes and help build the first Episcopal Church in the Lower Ninth Ward. While we have accomplished great things in Bay St. Louis, the Lower Ninth Ward is pretty much as it was immediately after Hurricane Katrina. What is left of the homes still bear the spray paint markings of how many dead bodies were found there. However, we fell in love with the children we worked with there and realized that no matter how devastating the conditions, we could see God's hand at work and hope on the horizon.

Soon after that was the Episcopal Church's General Convention. I was blessed enough to be part of a select group to represent the youth of the church, called the Official Youth Presence, which has seat and voice in the House of Deputies. I was also given the opportunity to deliver a speech to the House of Bishops on evangelism, in which I asked, is the Episcopal Church fishers of men or just keepers of the aquarium?

These past three years have been an amazing experience not only for the Youth Commission, but also for me personally. This diocese is so different from any other, because of the love and support it has for its youth. I have experienced it firsthand.

From staying up late at the provincial synod with Fr Ward and Archdeacon Hobbs in our rocking chairs at Kanuga, discussing life in the church, to learning the different sacraments in a very new and interesting ways from Fr. Pecaro. Thank you.

I've experienced it by traveling all the way to California for General Convention, and having Mary Cox and Jackie Fernandez watching over me as my "second mothers." Thank you.

At home, I've experienced it from the life blood of the Youth Commission, Mary Cobiella. You have always been there for me and have done so much for the Youth Commission. Thank you for everything.

Of course, I've experienced it my whole life thanks to Fr Bob Deshaies, my rector. From the time I was little you have shaped my faith and made me into the Christian I am today. Without you I would not be standing here today, nor would I be half the man I am. I will never be able to thank you enough.

The love and support I have experienced in this diocese unquestionably comes from the leader of our diocese, Bishop Frade. As I look back on my time as Youth Commission president, no one stands out more than you. You were the first to speak with me after I delivered my first speech at the diocesan convention two years ago. I was surprised that a bishop would do that. At General Convention, even though you were the senior bishop and were supposed to be setting a good example for the younger bishops, you came off the floor and spoke with me and then escorted me to the podium to give my speech, showing that even at the national level your youth come first. Bishop, you have guided me every step of the way as president and shown me how to be a true Christian leader: Thank you not only for me, but for all the youth in our diocese--we are truly blessed.

In a diocese that values its youth as much as ours does, there is nothing but good ahead for us in the future. Although this is my last year as Youth Commission president, I am confident that the Youth Commission will not only continue on with the work it has already started, but go on to do even bigger and better things. I hope that you all will continue to show the next group of Youth Commission officers the same love and compassion that you have shown me.

Once again, thank you all for everything you have done and continue to do for me and the youth of our diocese. I hope as I continue on in life I will be able to live up to the time and effort that you all have put into me, and God willing I'll see you all in seven years as a priest in the greatest diocese in the world, the Diocese of Southeast Florida! Thank you.