

Report from the Diocesan Youth Missioner  
Rev. Hilary Bogert-Winkler

The 2017-18 school year marked my fourth year serving as Diocesan Youth Missioner. While 2015-16 saw a sharp rise in youth participation in diocesan events, 16-17 saw those numbers going down sharply, and last year they dwindled even further. This is an issue that is occurring throughout the Episcopal Church, both on congregational and diocesan levels, as we continue to adjust our programs to the increasingly-busy schedules of youth and their families and as parish youth programs continue to experience turnover in leadership.

Despite this, I visited churches and youth groups throughout the diocese as I had planned to do, getting to know our young people and the adults who work with them. Many youth expressed interest in the spring retreat I was putting together with one of our Lawrence House interns--- Shalom Kristanugraha—yet when registration time came, only 1 youth signed up. Nevertheless, here is an overview of my visits and activities this past year:

Visited with youth and their leaders at: Grace Church Amherst; St. John's Northampton; St. Francis Holden; Christ Church Rochdale; St. Mark's East Longmeadow; St. Andrew's Longmeadow; All Saints Worcester; All Saints South Hadley  
Attended a youth retreat with St. Mark's East Longmeadow  
Planned a spring youth retreat with Shalom Kristanugraha, Lawrence House Intern  
Guest Chaplain at Barbara C. Harris Camp (July-August 2018)

This year will be a year of discernment with the diocese about the future of diocesan youth ministry. The primary part of that will be continued visits on my part—this time primarily with parish clergy and youth leaders to hear from them about their needs, challenges, and joys in parish youth ministry, and how a diocesan youth mission can be a part of that. Parish youth ministry is going relatively well in many parishes throughout the diocese. Connecting on a diocesan level, however, remains a challenge.

On the hopeful side, we have many strong youth programs throughout our diocese, and even in parishes without youth groups, young people are involved as acolytes, ushers, vestry members, lectors, and convention delegates. These young people aren't the future of the church—they are part of the church today. It is a joy and a blessing to see them at work in our church and in our world!