

## 2022 Lutheran Youth and Adult Leader Poll Executive Summary

### About the Poll

The *Lutheran Youth Poll (LYP)* – formerly known as the *Lutheran Youth Fellowship Poll* – has been conducted every three years at LCMS Youth Gatherings since the 1980s. Over these four decades, tens of thousands of LCMS teenagers have participated in the polls, providing insight into their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.

In July of 2022, 1,744 youth took the poll at the Youth Gathering in Houston, TX. A related poll featuring several questions from the Youth Poll was also conducted among Adult Leaders (n=817) at the Gathering, as well as poll of Young Adult Volunteers (n=392). When relevant, some responses from those polls are mentioned in this report.

### Who Are the Youth at the Gathering?

The LYP seeks to understand the changing complexities of the lives of young people in the church, particularly related to their spiritual beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Additionally, the poll explores aspects of their upbringing and attempts to look ahead to where they think they are going in life. To summarize the results of the poll we will look at these five categories: Spiritual beliefs; Opinions on Cultural “Hot Topics”; Behaviors; Family Life and Home Church; and Looking Ahead.

It is important to point out that the sample for the poll likely bears significant bias. The sample of youth for this poll is not from all LCMS young people, but those who attended the Youth Gathering. These youth tend to be (though not always) more engaged in their home church and/or youth ministry than others who did not attend. For instance, 7 in 10 responses came from youth who attend worship nearly every week, while less than 10 total came from individuals saying they are not Christian. This bias may be even stronger in the Young Adult Poll. These young adults not only highly active in their congregation but have gone through an application process to serve at the event.

### 2022 LYP SAMPLE OVERVIEW (N=1,744)

I am...	%	I am...	%	I attend...	%
Male	36%	13 years old	2%	Worship Weekly	71%
Female	64%	14 years old	20%	Worship Less than Weekly	29%
		15 years old	22%		
Confirmed LCMS	90%	16 years old	21%	Public School	68%
Baptized LCMS	6%	17 years old	20%	Lutheran School	18%
Other Christian	4%	18 years old	13%	Other Private School	7%
Not a Christian	<1%	19 years old	2%	Homeschool	7%

### Spiritual Beliefs

While the LYP is not designed to test for a complete understanding of LCMS doctrine, it does ask a few key questions to gauge young people’s understanding the basics of faith and how it relates to their daily life. What do these young people believe about salvation and the Bible, and how does that shape their daily habits and practices?

#### KEY LYP RESULTS ITEMS REGARDING SPIRITUAL BELIEFS AND DISCIPLINES

Spiritual Belief or Practice	Weekly	Non-Weekly
<b>Regarding Salvation:</b>		
To be saved you have to believe in Jesus Christ	77%	56%
To be saved you have to believe in Jesus Christ and do good works	7%	9%
Many paths (faiths) lead to salvation	10%	20%
<b>Regarding the Bible:</b>		
Authority: The Bible is the true Word of God	86%	67%
Relevant: The Bible is applicable today	72%	53%
Truthful: The Bible contains error mixed with truth ( <i>disagree</i> )	71%	48%
Authority + Relevant + Truthful	54%	30%
<b>Spiritual Practices:</b>		
Pray on Own Daily	60%	35%
Pray on Own Rarely or Never	12%	28%
Read Bible on Own Daily	15%	6%
Read Bible on Own Rarely or Never	51%	76%
Rely on God to Make Life Decisions ( <i>always or usually</i> )	64%	45%
Attend Bible Study (at least once a month)	74%	41%

While the adult leaders attending the Gathering were far more likely to affirm strong views of the Bible (89% affirming its authority, relevance, and truthfulness), many admit to not reading the Bible regularly. Nearly 30% of these adults say they rarely or never read the Bible on their own, and 20% do not pray daily on their own.

### Bringing a Physical Bible to School

One question that has been asked on polls past, is how often youth bring a Bible to school. The proliferation of Bible apps on smartphones has led a drop in the practice of bringing a Bible to school, so an alternative answer, “No I use a digital Bible”, had to be added. This question is a strong indicator of Lutheran school students. However, it is somewhat surprising to see that so few students at Lutheran schools bring a *physical* Bible to school.

Take a Physical Bible to School	2022	2019	Lutheran School	Public School
Almost every day	18%	12%	55%	4%
Once a week	3%	2%	6%	1%
Once a month	2%	2%	2%	3%
Rarely, if ever	33%	35%	10%	42%
No, I use a digital Bible	43%	48%	27%	50%

### Opinions on Cultural “Hot Topics”

In addition to asking questions related to their faith and spiritual beliefs, the LYP asks youth a series of questions on topics that are heavily discussed in the culture today. While these topics are important to many in today’s culture, they also relate to faith and are informed by the Bible. These items reveal a significant gap in the way weekly worshipers think compared with those who attend less frequently.

#### LYP ITEMS ON YOUTH VIEWS OF HOT TOPICS

Issue	Weekly	Non-Weekly
<b>Abortion</b>		
“Always illegal”	40%	18%
“A woman has the right to choose”	19%	43%
<b>Gender and Sexuality</b>		
Pre-marital sex is “always wrong”	54%	22%
Homosexual acts are “always wrong”	55%	25%
Homosexual orientation is “always wrong” or wrong “if acted upon”	51%	28%
Changing from one’s biological gender at birth is “always wrong”	58%	33%
Homosexual couples should be allowed to get married	29%	57%
<b>Ordination of Women</b>		
“Women cannot be pastors”	32%	11%
“Okay for women to be pastors”	31%	57%
“I don’t know” or “More study and discussions”	37%	32%
<b>Science and Religion</b>		
“The Bible disproves certain scientific conclusions”	24%	12%
“God created humans at one time in pretty much our current form.”	72%	49%
“Humans evolved over many years and God directed this process.”	16%	29%

*Table does not show every response option*

There is also a significant gap on some issues between men and women. These gaps are an important reminder to youth leaders that not every teen they in their congregation holds strongly to Lutheran beliefs on these issues. It becomes all the more important to encourage discussion, Scriptural study, humble confidence, and discernment about the information sources to which they may be listening.

### Increasing “I Don’t Know” Responses

A notable difference from the responses to the 2019 poll is a general increase in “I don’t know” answers on these issues. While an “I don’t know” can indicate general ignorance on a topic, it is also possible that these answers indicate “I have not yet made up my mind.” Since these are all topics that are discussed often in our culture, it is less likely that youth are ignorant of the issues, and more likely that they are wrestling with competing views from church and other influences.

Issue	“I don’t know” 2019	“I don’t know” 2022
Pre-marital sex	18%	24%
Homosexuality	29%	32%
Ordination of women	15%	18%
Evolution / Human origins	6%	11%
Abortion	7%	9%
Changing one’s gender from birth	<i>*not asked</i>	20%

## Behaviors

The LYP has also tracked certain risky behaviors that are often associated with teenagers. While the 2022 Poll did not reveal significant new trends in these behaviors from three years prior, these questions one again highlight the divide between weekly and non-weekly worshipers.

### RISKY BEHAVIORS AMONG YOUTH

Risky Behavior	Weekly	Non-Weekly
Have never vaped or used e-cigarettes	90%	81%
Have never used other tobacco products	96%	89%
Have never used Marijuana	93%	86%
Have never drunk alcohol (other than the Lord’s Supper)	68%	52%
Have never drunk more than five alcoholic drinks in 24 hours	94%	86%
Have never viewed pornography	71%	62%
Have never been sexually active	83%	69%
Have never taken sexually explicit photos	81%	73%

Despite changing laws across the country, teen use of Marijuana remained unchanged from 2019. Among adult leaders, however, occasional use of Marijuana increased from less than 1% in 2019, to over 3% this year, and the number of adults saying they “have never” tried it fell from 81% to 76%. The LYP also asks about use of other drugs. Fortunately, the results showed very low usage across all groups.

## Youth Rankings of How They Spend Their Time

In addition to assessing risky behaviors among youth, the LYP recently began asking about ways young people spend their time. Most youth (with no difference by age, gender, or church involvement) say they are too busy. Barely 28% say they have some free time, with 39% saying they don’t have enough time to get things done. By far, most of their time is spent studying or in sports. Even the youth most committed to church rank church activities and youth ministry low in their schedules. It is important for parents and youth leaders to work alongside teens to help them manage time and set Godly priorities for what they choose to do.

Activity	Rank	% in Top 2 Activities	% in Top 5 (3-5) Activities
Homework/studying	1	45%	34%
Sports	2	44%	20%
Extracurriculars other than sports	3	32%	42%
Work	4	30%	27%
Video games	5	18%	24%
Social Activities	6	16%	36%
Youth Ministry	7	7%	37%
Other Church Activities	8	5%	36%
Volunteering / Community Service	9	3%	23%

This ranked approach to how young people spend their time was new to the 2022 poll, so there are not comparable results from prior polls.

### Social Media Presence of Youth Compared with Adult Leadership

Where young people spend time online is increasingly important in this digital age. Interestingly, there were not many differences in social media usage between weekly and non-weekly worshippers. However, there were notable differences in the social media footprints of youth and their adult leaders. Given the enormous influence social media can have on the way people think, it may be important for adult leaders to maintain a presence in places where youth are likely to participate online. While it isn't necessary to have a ministry presence on each of these apps, it is key to knowing how to communicate with teens and to understand who may be influencing them.

Social Media App/Network	Youth Daily	Youth Rarely/Never	Adult Rarely/Never
Messaging Apps	87%	9%	31%
SnapChat	65%	31%	70%
Instagram	55%	35%	52%
YouTube	50%	20%	28%
TikTok	49%	45%	79%
Facebook	15%	74%	16%
Twitter	8%	82%	81%

### Family Life and Home Church

In an age of broken families, with many children splitting time between their parents separately, it may be encouraging to hear that most of the young people attending the Gathering were from intact families. Sadly, data from the poll shows that when families are affected by divorce or separation, worship habits are impacted. It is understandably difficult for co-parents to share the same congregation post-divorce. It can also be difficult for teens to get to worship or youth ministry programming if the parents are not engaged. This may mean youth leaders should consider finding additional supportive adults, communication, and encouragement to those teens whose parents are divorced or whose parents are less active in worship as well.

#### HOME SITUATION

About Their Parents	Weekly	Non-Weekly
Lives with both biological parents	85%	70%
Biological parents are divorced	9%	20%
Parents attend worship weekly	92%	20%

### Young People's Relationship with Parents

In addition to showing the importance of having an intact family, the LYP also revealed strong correlations within teens' relationships with their parents. Teens who regularly attend worship are much more likely to get along with their parents and have faith incorporated at home.

Relationship with Parents	Weekly	Non-Weekly
"I discuss life decisions with my parents"	90%	80%
"My parents and I communicate well"	86%	76%
"My parents and I rarely fight"	66%	56%
"My parents are very/mostly supportive of my faith"	94%	82%
"My family discusses faith at home"	82%	57%
"My parents and I pray together"	64%	34%

Of note, in 2019, families discussed faith at home and prayed together at identical rates (25-26% strongly agree / 35-30% agree). In 2022, these measures changed in opposite directions. Discussing faith increased (32% strongly agree) while praying with parents decreased (only 19% strongly agree). In other words, compared to 2019, families are discussing faith more often but praying together less.

### Growing Mental Health Crisis

Today’s young people are more aware of the importance of mental health than previous generations. As will be shown later in this report, mental health is an important topic for young people, and one of their top concerns for the future. Consistent with other research, particularly coming out of 2020 COVID lockdowns, we see a striking increase in personal experiences of mental health struggles.

Mental Health Struggles	2019 Youth	2022 Youth	2022 YAV	2022 Adult
Personally, this past year	33%	48%	44%	28%
Personally, no, never	35%	19%	23%	43%
Someone close, this past year	50%	54%	58%	58%

There has not been a significant change from 2019 in the rate of knowing other people who have had mental health struggles. This suggests that the personal increase is more than just awareness of mental health, but a direct sign of increased struggle.

### Details of Home Congregations

Finally, the Poll asked youth a series of questions about their home congregations. Most youth gave positive reports, saying they feel supported by their church, that they have an adult they feel safe confiding in, and that their pastor cares about them personally. While most youth feel this way, the sentiment is more common among weekly worshipers. There were no significant differences, however, among youth feeling that “teens are a priority”, with less than two-thirds of youth affirming this about their church. There is a similar drop in “teens are a priority” from adults as well.

Congregation Life	Weekly	Non-Weekly
“My pastor cares about me as a person”	92%	77%
“There is at least one adult at my church I feel comfortable openly discussing doubts, struggles and difficult questions”	83%	73%
“My congregation is very/mostly supportive of my faith”	82%	70%
“Teens are a priority at my church”	64%	63%
<b>What kind of services does your church offer?</b>		
Traditional only	28%	22%
Contemporary only	5%	4%
Traditional and Contemporary	54%	49%
“I don’t know”	11%	25%

### Looking Ahead

In addition to asking youth to report on their lives so far, young people were asked to respond to what they think about the future. First, were a few questions about college, career, and finding a church when they go off on their own. While it may not be surprising that weekly worshipers are more likely than non-weekly worshipers to consider careers in church work, it is somewhat surprising to see a difference in the way these two groups view college. It may also be encouraging to Synod, to see that a third of regular worship attenders are willing to consider church work, however, this measure has not changed since 2019, despite a new Synodwide initiative for recruiting church workers.

### College and Career Plans

College and Career	Weekly	Non-Weekly
College is a worthwhile investment	82%	77%
Planning / Considering professional church work	31%	17%

### Future Church Involvement

Youth were also asked to pick the top factors they would consider if they had to find a new home congregation. Overall, most of the differences between weekly and non-weekly worshipers were slight. One key difference was that over half of non-weekly worshipers selected “friendly atmosphere” as an important detail, compared to only 41% of weekly worshipers. This was the top pick among non-weekly worshipers yet ranked fourth among weekly worshipers. A second significant difference was that only a quarter of non-weekly worshipers think it is important that they find an LCMS Church.

Congregations should be aware how their welcome and atmosphere may impact their ability to connect with young adults. This also highlights the importance of helping teens consider how to transition to a new congregation if they move away for college, military or career. The YAV Poll let us know that congregations do not consistently support these kinds of transitions. Only 30% said their parents prepared them to find a new church by the time they moved away. Eight percent of YAVs said that their home church actively connected them with a new church when they moved away and 46% said their home congregation connected with them when they moved.

What Would You Look for in a New Church	Weekly	Non-Weekly
Style of worship	45%	42%
In line with my views and beliefs	45%	37%
LCMS Lutheran church	43%	25%
Friendly atmosphere	41%	57%
Welcoming community	32%	38%
Style of preaching	31%	31%
Plenty of people my age	16%	21%
Active in serving the community	16%	16%
Bible Study opportunities	12%	8%
Opportunities to serve and/or lead	11%	6%
“Honestly, I don’t plan to attend church”	2%	7%

One positive result among non-weekly worshipers is that over 90% of them say they plan to continue attending church in the future.

### Issues Youth Think Will Be Important in Coming Years

The Poll has historically asked youth to consider what issues concern them most about their lives and the world around them. In 2019, youth picked “My Future” as their biggest concern. Interestingly, this individualistic choice was picked much less in 2022, coming in fourth overall. Abortion and Mental Health topped the list in 2022, picked by more than 3 in every 10 youth.

Rank	Issues that Most Concern You (Select THREE)	All 2022	All 2019	Rank 2019
1	Abortion	34%	23%	3
2	Mental Health	30%	27%	2
3	Gun Control	18%	9%	14
4	My future	17%	28%	1
5	Suicide	13%	13%	7
6	Reaching unbelievers	13%	11%	13
7	College	11%	15%	4
8	Physical / Sexual abuse	10%	8%	18
9	Gender identity / change	10%	*not asked	
10	Cancer	9%	14%	6

*Abbreviated list, showing only the most common selections*

In addition to selecting three issues that concern them most, youth were also asked to name (in their own words) three topics that they wish their church would talk about more. Interestingly, while LGBTQ issues were not often selected among issues that concerned them (above), these were the most common topics they want their church to address. Of note, youth who wrote in topics related to LGBTQ issues represented all views from the earlier poll questions about their beliefs on homosexuality and changing gender.

Rank	You wish your church would talk more about... (from their own words)	All 2022
1	LGBTQ Issues	32%
2	Mental Health	30%
3	Abortion	30%
4	Reaching Unbelievers	15%
5	Personal Faith	9%
6	Women’s Equality	8%
7	Racism	8%

*Abbreviated list, showing only the most common responses*

It is important that churches not hesitate to take on difficult topics. The current generation of teens are aware of difficult topics in our culture and are looking for the church openly and honestly talk about what God says about challenging cultural issues. These conversation should center around God’s Word, but also allow for healthy discourse around the influence of culture and how they live out their vocations.



### Where Youth Turn for Information on Important Topics

Finally, new to the 2022 Poll, youth were asked where they are most likely to get information about their concerns and topics of interest. While the internet ranked higher than many might like to see, it is encouraging to see that the internet’s influence was ranked well below that of parents and the Bible.

Resource	Rank	% in Top 2 Sources	% in Top 5 (3-5) Sources
Bible	1	47%	20%
Parents	2	34%	44%
Internet	3	26%	26%
Pastors	4	24%	37%
Friends	5	18%	34%
Social media	6	18%	20%
Catechism	7	16%	17%
Podcasts/Videos	8	8%	26%
Other adults	9	5%	32%
School teachers	10	3%	21%

The table above shows responses from all youth. Not surprisingly, weekly worshipers were even more likely to select the Bible as their top answer. Non-weekly worshipers, however, were more likely to select the internet and social media. The blending of the digital and relational means that youth ministry can have a positive impact on how young people see the challenges in front of them and provide a lens for them to see the vast amount of information provided for them on the internet and social media.

### Conclusion

Overall, the 2022 Poll shows an increasing difficult struggle against the influence of secular culture, whether it be on issues of gender and sexuality, or leading toward certain risky behaviors. The church can be encouraged that young people who attend regularly are much more likely to affirm Biblical principles and live accordingly. Yet as those who do not attend worship as regularly show signs of diverging from Biblical teaching and practice, we are reminded of the importance of getting them back in the pews every week to receive the sacraments and hear proper preaching of the Word.