

# youth OF THE REDEEMER

## Youth Leaders Handbook

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*They are like trees  
planted by streams of water,  
which yield their fruit in its season,  
and their leaves do not wither.  
In all that they do, they prosper.*

*—Psalm 1:3*

# Core Values

- **Relationships**
  - Growing personal connection with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
  - Flourishing and healthy relationships between youth that grow their faith
  - Leaders that model Christianity maturity and shepherd the youth
  - Intergenerational relationships with members the congregation
- **Belonging & Identity**
  - Joyfilled identity formed by who Christ is and what he has done
  - Sense of belonging to the body of Christ, including the local body of Church of the Redeemer
  - Youth feel that adults and other youth love and know them
- **Mission & Calling**
  - Active participation in the youth group
  - Service within the larger community of Church of the Redeemer
  - Service projects for justice, peace, and reconciliation outside the church doors
  - Development of skills and spiritual gifts
  - Compassionate and joyful witness to the gospel to friends and schools

# Key Practices

- **Prayer:** We bring all things before God, inviting him into the good and the messiness of our lives. Youth are growing in their ability to pray corporately and privately.
- **Scripture:** Scripture is a means through which we encounter Christ and his truth. The *BCP* invites us to “read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest” God’s word, not just reading the words of the Bible but studying, reflecting, and applying them to our own life. Youth learn about the Bible and the arc of God’s narrative of redemption in it. They are growing in their ability to engage with Scripture individually and see how God speaks through it into their own lives.
- **Worship:** Worship is our proper response to who God is and what he has done. Worship forms us in our relationship with Christ. Youth engage in worship in the Anglican tradition, while having the freedom to explore the tradition within their contemporary context.
- **Service:** Service is a response to the God who comes to us as a servant and washes our feet. Youth have opportunities to serve within the youth group, church, and outside the church. These opportunities allow them to develop their gifts and skills.
- **Testimony:** In testimonies, we share stories of God’s work in our lives, proclaiming that we serve a resurrected Jesus who is active in the world now through the Holy Spirit. Youth hear testimonies from members of the church and develop in their ability to share their own testimonies.
- **Modeling:** Faith is as much caught as it is taught. Leaders model the above values and practices to youth who in turn model it to each other.

*that they may be called oaks of righteousness,  
the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.*

*—Isaiah 61:3b*

# Expectations

## YOUTH LEADER

### Personal

- Have a growing relationship with Jesus Christ
- Attend church regularly
- Model mature Christian behavior

### Responsibilities

- Serve at least three a month on Sundays
- Form relationships with youth
- Lead small group discussions
- Lead youth in prayer
- Participate regularly in non-Sunday events

# SafeGuarding

For Church of the Redeemer's safety policy, see the SafeGuarding Policy.

*But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.*

*—John 10:2-4*



# Building Relationships

Relationships are critical to ministering to and with youth. It is from those relationships that youth observe us and that we have opportunities to speak into their lives. At this stage of life, they crave attention from adults who are not their parents. Youth may not remember the specifics of what they are taught in youth group. They will remember the adults that cared about them and invested time in their lives. You don't even need to be "cool" to influence youth; caring about them will make you "cool."

Jesus's discipleship did involve formal teaching, but it also included a lot of time spent walking, eating, and sharing life with his twelve followers. Building relationships doesn't come automatically; it requires a few things:

- Time: the average young person needs time before they open up and look to you as a role model. That is why a regular commitment to youth events is important.
- Participation: joining in games and activities and being silly with them builds trust and respect and breaks down barriers.
- Meeting youth where they are at: most youth are not ready to step into deep conversations about the Bible and theology. They are more likely to talk about clothes, sports, Nerf guns, books, movies, etc. Starting there allows you to get to know them as whole people and can be a stepping stone to deeper conversations.

## Modeling

Most of what you will do as a leader is modeling. Youth will learn through your interactions with them and how they see you behave. This includes when you are "off duty" outside of youth group. Be intentional in the way you interact with the youth.

*Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.*

*—1 Corinthians 11:1*

## **Mentoring**

There are opportunities for varying degrees of formality in mentoring. Mentoring in preparation for Confirmation is highly formalized. Taking a group of girls out for coffee, meeting boys for breakfast, or texting a youth to see how they are doing are informal.

When meeting or communicating with youth outside of church functions, follow all directions in the safety policy. Make sure that the youth director and parents are aware of the interactions.

## **Engaging Youth**

Whether you are informally shaping youth or formally mentoring, here are some suggestions for engaging youth:

### **Embrace the Small Stuff**

Superficial things are seldom superficial for preteens and teens. Clothes, Nerf guns, sports, and food are important for them. Meet youth where they are at and engage with the things that they are interested in. This builds relational capital and trust that can allow you to go deeper at the right time. Be patient! A discussion about clothes may bring fears about how a youth is treated by friends, which can then go to a deeper discussion about identity and how God sees us.

### **Make Windows**

Give the youth windows into your spiritual life. Seeing the interior of your faith is a major way that they will develop their own interior spiritual lives. Remember that windows are not doors. Giving youth an unfiltered or age-inappropriate look could be harmful. The windows are for growing youth, not for your benefit or finding someone to process with.

### **Include Scripture & Prayer**

Incorporating Scripture and prayer can be powerful. Tell the youth about something you are reading right now in the Bible and what you are learning, i.e., give them a window. Ask if they have anything you can pray about them for and/or offer to pray with them on the spot.

# Communication

If you are building relationships with youth, it is likely that they will want to communicate with you outside church via social media, texting, or email. Here are some guidelines for communication:

- Let youth initiate the contact unless there is a specific reason to reach out to them; for example, seeing they were absent from youth group or reminding them that you are praying about a math test they mentioned on Sunday.
- Communication is about the youth's needs, not your own. It should not be driven by your need for a friendship or someone to process your thoughts with.
- Keep the youth director aware of your communication and the youth's parent
- If difficult or sensitive topics arise, inform the youth director. That will provide protection for you in case unfounded accusations arise.
- Your role is to encourage an outward spiral, not an inward spiral. Encourage them to look to parents, pastors, teachers, friends, and other youth leaders, not to become dependent on yourself.
- What you discuss should be kept private, but cannot be kept secret. You cannot promise to not tell anyone. You may be required by law to share certain information that youth share with you.

*Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*  
—Ephesians 4:15–16

# Tricky Stuff

- **Parents:** It is best to speak in general terms if parents ask about conversations with youth, with the exception of threats to a youth's safety(See below). Youth who believe that you share everything they say with a parent are likely to shut down.
- **Controversial Subjects:** Subjects about which Christians disagree are sure to come up with youth. These could be about sexual orientation, women's ordination, Creationism vs. Evolution, etc. Topics like these should be approached with grace, generosity, patience, and love. One of the fastest ways to turn a youth off from Christianity is to shut down questions or tell them that there are forbidden topics. Aim to convey Church of the Redeemer's view on the subject. Provide not only the "what" but also the "why." You can also indicate where Christians genuinely disagree (youth need to know that belief is not always black and white).
- **Sensitive Subjects:** These include a youth viewing pornography, engaging in sexual behavior, or questioning their sexuality or gender identity. Your aim in these circumstances should be to bring the youth into community rather than isolation: encourage them to talk to parents, pastors, and other youth leaders. Let the youth know that you will respect their privacy but for the sake of accountability you need to inform the youth director or a pastor that you discussed a sensitive subject. Ask if you can share the subject and, if yes, any details. Respect the level of disclosure that the youth seeks at that point. At minimum, please let myself or a pastor know that a sensitive topic was discussed.
- **Discussions of self-harm, suicidal ideation, or abuse** need to be shared with myself and/or the Safety Coordinator. Let the youth know that you need to share these things. Tell them to whom and what you will share. Sharing the whom and what will give them a greater sense of security and confidentiality.