

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

Dear Youth Leader,

Working with youth is hard. They are no longer quite children but also not quite adults. They are noisy, loud, and messy. They may not trust you easily and the fruit of your work is often hard to see and slow to appear. Why would anyone want to work with youth? Because nothing important is ever easy. Youth are the future of the church and the church of today.

The ages eleven through eighteen often set the spiritual trajectory of young people. Although children's ministry lays a critical foundation of faith, it needs care to harden and cure before facing the challenge of adult independence. Will a youth continue in the faith or will they fade away? Will they become active participants in church and even leaders or will they see church as an optional part of life? The teenage years can be the first time youth lead others in worship, share their testimonies, or lead a Bible study. These years have the potential to set them on the trajectory to being youth leaders, priests, and teachers. You have the incredible responsibility of helping them discover their spiritual gifts and fill the roles that God has prepared for them to do in the future. Our Timothys need Pauls.

As much as youth are the future of the church, they are also the present. Joel 2:28, which Peter quotes on Pentecost, is a reminder that the Holy Spirit isn't reserved for those who graduate from high school. Youth are vital and important members of the church that God can work through now. Sometimes the Holy Spirit can work more powerfully through them because of the flexibility of their youth. That is often where the joy of working with youth is located for me: seeing young people encounter a living and active God, watching them do the work of the church as they minister to peers and adults. Usually all we see of this are glimmers, but it is a reminder of the slow patient work that Christ is doing in them and us.

Thanks for joining on this adventure!

Grace,

Caleb Molstad

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 Christian 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
 - All youth feel a sense of belonging to the youth group and the body of Christ, especially 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
 - Development of skills and spiritual gifts
 - Compassionate and joyful witness to the gospel to friends and schools
 - Service projects for justice, peace, and reconciliation outside the church doors

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. 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 that 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 once a month on Sundays
- Form relationships with youth
- Lead small group in prayer
- Participate in non-Sunday events as able, including Bible studies, hangouts, and service projects

Safe Church

For Church of the Redeemer's safety policy, see the Safe Church 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



Compline

Compline is a traditional service for the close of day. “Compline” comes from the same Latin root as “complete.” In addition to a meal, it forms a core part of Sunday youth group.

Worship Lab

One way to approach youth leading Compline is as a worship lab. Each generation needs to make the historic Christian traditions alive and new if they are to adopt them as their own. Compline gives youth the space to experiment and try new things while staying in the framework of Anglican worship and the bounds put in place by more experienced Christians. That means that not every experiment will work out and while quality is important, it is not the highest priority. The measure of success is growing youth.

Hands on Discipleship

People learn by doing. Youth will learn how to worship, teach, and pray, adding skills to head knowledge about Christianity. One of the goals of youth group is, ironically, to prepare for Christian life after youth group. Adults support through coaching, gracious feedback, and modeling.

Leadership Development

For the church to continue, we need youth who will be the future deacons, rectors, priests, bishops, music leaders, sound booth techies, arts designers, etc. Compline is a place where youth are first given an opportunity to step into those roles and develop their spiritual gifts and God-given skills.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.
—*Ephesians 4:11–14*

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 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 rapport and breaks down barriers.
- Meet youth where they are: most youth are not ready to step into deep conversations about the Bible and theology. They are more likely to be sarcastic or 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.

Give youth windows into your spiritual life. Seeing the interior of your faith is a major way 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.

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

—1 Corinthians 11:1

Talking to Young People

Talking to young people can be intimidating. They may seem to speak another language or not speak at all. It can be difficult to know which role you should take. You are not their parent. You also aren't a friend in the sense of being equals: there are age and power differences between you. You are instead in the role of a mentor or senior apprentice showing the ropes to a junior apprentice in the service of the Master Jesus.

Here are a few suggestions for talking to young people:

- Jesus in Luke 10:27 states the Great Commandment as, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” Humans are heart, soul, mind, and body complexes in relationship with others (neighbors). It can be possible to approach a relationship like this thinking that it should only focus on the “spiritual.” If the Great Commandment expresses the complexity of what it means to be a human, then the spiritual is connected to other parts of life.

- Lecturing feels like an easy solution. If you could just tell them what they need to know, it would all be simple. The weakness of lecturing is that it aims at the mind, which is only one part of who we are. Lecturing should only be one method among many ways of teaching. Use depends on age and development too.
- Resist the urge to fix. If a youth tells you about a fight with a sibling, it is easy to say, "Well just don't hit them back." Most kids already know what they should do; it's the doing that is the problem. As James 1:19 says, "be quick to hear, slow to speak." Slowing down and helping them feel that you understand what is going on is a good place to start rather than jumping to a solution.
- A well chosen question can be as powerful as a well chosen statement. It allows your partner to do some of the work, which can make lessons stick better.
- Be curious and open alongside the youth. You may have more experience, time, and knowledge than the youth, but compared to God, we are all children. You can model that humble openness to what God is doing.

Mentoring

Mentoring is a two way relationship. Young people want to be known. They also want to know the adults who care about them. In watching you share about your life and faith, they learn how to share about theirs. Be prepared to ask questions and answer those questions for yourself. Remember that sharing and self disclosure are about the needs of the youth, not about your personal or emotional needs. Choose what and how much to share about yourself and experiences with the larger purpose of partnering in view.

Mentor Safeguarding

- Mentors must be done in a public place: coffee shop, park, restaurant, etc.
- Parents and the youth director must be aware of the meetings
- Adults are not to transport youth
- Youth must be paired with a prayer partner of the same gender
- Mentors must follow all guidelines for interaction with youth in Church of the Redeemer's Safe Church policy

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 has 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. Do find ways to encourage parents in their parenting.
- **Controversial Subjects:** Subjects about which Christians disagree may come up with youth. These could be views 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 within the bounds of orthodoxy (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 the youth director or a pastor know that a sensitive topic was discussed.
- **Discussions of self-harm, suicidal ideation, or abuse** need to be shared with the youth director 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.

Notes