

Formation Priority Strategic Overview: A New Discipleship Model for a New Generation

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A New Discipleship Model for a New Generation

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Formation Strategies

Strategy 1: Foundational Ecclesiology

Articulate and teach a shared ecclesiology. While its expression must be adaptable to various ages and stages of spiritual development, our ecclesiology must emphasize the commitment to minister to each other across generations.

The church is *here* to glorify God, to participate in His mission to seek and save the lost, as well as to cultivate the flourishing of His creation. We must understand and embrace the role of the church in the shared story of the people of God, and be submitted to His purposes rather than our preferences—and even our passions.

At the same time, participation in the body of Christ will look different for someone who is three years old, 33, or 93. This requires taking the long view of how our ministries shape people's view of the purpose of the church throughout their lifetime. Children & Youth need to have God's vision for the church instilled in them from an early age so they see their role as agents in God's story, rather than as consumers. Their parents need to know that they are the primary disciplers of their children, and the church can help equip and support them to do that. Youth and young adults need to experience that they belong to a vibrant family of God made up of many generations, and that *being* the church is essential to the life of the believer. Meanwhile, older generations who have lived through Christendom, attractional church, and/or emerging/missional church need to understand how contextualizing for yet another day and age continues to advance the gospel more effectively—and how later generations are longing for their support and involvement in their lives.

We need to be intentional about creating opportunities and casting vision for the generations to minister to each other, within and beyond the church. Ministering to one another across the generations, inside and beyond the church, is what keeps us connected to our reason for being: the mission of God.

We must keep in mind across ages and stages the lifelong journey of formation and participation in the church's mission. As Bonhoeffer writes in *Life Together*: "The church is only the church when it exists for others."

Our ecclesiology needs to address:

1. What is the role of the church in the shared story of the people of God?
2. What is the role of *this* church?
3. What does it look like for Children & Family, Youth, Young Adults, Adults, Women, Men, Boomers, Adult+ ministries to express this?
4. How do we intentionally create opportunities for various "age and stages" to minister to one another across generations?

Strategy 2: Discipleship Pathway

Develop and integrate a discipleship pathway as the organizational principle for ministry, as well as for the personal and collective growth of the congregation.

FPC has a rich history of developing new offerings and ministry programs. However, as we have added more, we have struggled to resource (and even communicate about) these ever-proliferating opportunities. Maintaining existing programs often comes at the expense of addressing new ministry needs that have emerged. Several months ago, when Dana Allin led us through an assessment of where we are as a church, the Session confirmed it is hard for new people to know how to get meaningfully connected at FPC and that we lack a clear pathway for how to grow at FPC.

We need a discipleship pathway to align our ministry areas with the needs of disciples. This will also make it clear to people how they can grow as followers of Jesus at FPC. With transformational discipleship as the goal of the whole church, we can align our church rhythms, ministry efforts, programs, and practices, to effectively form followers of Christ who worship God with their whole lives and live out their faith “here”. The pathway helps people on their journey to become more like Jesus.

With the pathway as our organizing principle, our ministry emphasis shifts from: “How can we get our people into our programs?” to “How can we resource God’s people on their lifelong pilgrimage?” In some cases, this might mean creating new resources to address needs and current gaps. In others, we might transfer program leadership from staff to lay leaders, or pause activities if lay leaders cannot be found. It could also mean that certain programs may continue, but will not be promoted as broadly or as frequently as others that are more formative. It *will* mean refining existing programs to become more effective in forming in God’s people the practices and postures of Jesus.

By using the marks of a mature disciple as signposts, we can focus our ministries on forming people that increasingly possess these characteristics. This will help provide a growth pathway characterized by clarity, priority, and progress, so the staff knows what to resource, and the congregation knows where to go and how to grow:

- **Clarity:** To become clear and compelling to the leadership, staff, and congregation, it must be simple and compelling.
- **Priority:** The pathway must have authority, both in terms of priority and functional leadership, to bring alignment by:
 - Clarifying key developments on a disciple’s journey and identifying current weak points so that we can resource/restructure accordingly
 - Streamlining staff-led ministry activities to make space for the pathway
 - Uniting the congregation around key moments/seasons in the church calendar where we share a single focus (e.g. preparing for ALPHA)
- **Progress:** This is a dynamic pathway that allows for continued growth of the individual, as well as the church body. It is not a flowchart of existing ministries. While programs resource disciples, they don’t disciple people. Jesus does. He calls us to do the same.

Strategy 3: Resource Gaps

Identify and prioritize “weak points” or gaps on the pathway, and resource/restructure accordingly.

While this strategy falls within the discipleship pathway initiatives (see Appendix B for the milestones), the pathway will fail to get off the ground if we do not consider what critical needs and stages of growth on the disciple’s journey we might be overlooking or under-resourcing. If we uncover gaps, we need to assign new resources or clear some existing responsibilities in order to effectively address them. Two examples have risen to the top already; both would involve cross-functional roles that weave across ministries.

Parent Development Director (paid or volunteer)

The first example was identified by Children & Family, Youth, Outreach, and Discipleship, recognizing certain demographics are struggling to find their place at FPC:

- Parents, especially those with young kids
- People who are either on the cusp of faith, are new to the faith, or lack a solid foundation in the faith.

Most youth group parents fall into both categories, as an estimated two-thirds of kids in the youth group have parents that don’t come to church with them. Parents have been falling in between the gaps of our ministry areas as our staff is already stretched too thin. Our recommendation is to have a key leader (whether paid staff or volunteer staff) that focuses on parents, working with these four departments to equip parents within the church and reach out to those outside the church.

Creating a role for a Director of Parent Development will help us equip parents so that they feel prepared for the work of forming their children as disciples. This person would liaise among the departments of Children, Youth, Discipleship, and Outreach, capitalizing on key moments within the ministry calendar to reach out and equip parents. They would create equipping resources for parents of children who are already engaged in the church, and partner with Outreach to mobilize the FPC community to reach out to un/dechurched parents of youth. In needing to create a culture at the church that invests in its children and youth, this director would proactively seek out partnering with other ministry areas, and create opportunities for the congregation to minister to one another across generations.

Executive-level Leadership for Discipleship (existing staff)

To effectively roll out the discipleship pathway, it must be owned and driven at an executive level as opposed to primarily owned by “middle management.”

There are two means of accomplishing this:

- 1) The senior or executive pastor owns the discipleship vision and focuses the lion’s share of their time on implementing this, providing oversight to the staff, creating ownership and actively aligning ministries

or

- 2) Discipleship is assigned executive-level leadership authority; this role would have the functional authority to provide oversight to the staff, align ministries, create calendar cohesion, and implement the pathway

Interestingly, Highland Park Presbyterian is in the process of elevating the discipleship pastor role to their executive team. They recognized this would help them to make discipleship primary.

Initially, this role at FPC primarily be staff-facing as we work on implementing the discipleship pathway. This requires hands-on coaching, helping the staff think through how their individual ministry areas can come into alignment with these five formation strategies, partnering with them to chart their path forward. Creating alignment among ministries will also require negotiating conflicting ministry programs and events to simplify the church calendar, and identifying specific opportunities for collaboration across ministry areas. After the initial implementation, it would take continued vigilance and refining to avoid vision drift. It would also involve considering the impact on discipleship with various church-wide decisions (e.g. how having one preacher per Sunday in two services would affect the formation of worshippers). If I were to do this role, I would need to transition some of my current responsibilities elsewhere. That would require expanding the discipleship team as we are already under-resourced.

Strategy 4: Relevant Faith

Address the issues people are experiencing and the questions they are asking in their particular age and/or life stage.

First, we need to recognize that many of the ministries, groups, and practices that have been the most formative in our own lives are not necessarily the most effective for today—let alone tomorrow. What was fundamental to us 50, 20, or even five years ago is likely not the best way to equip people in this day and age, because many of the needs and issues people are facing have changed. Some of what we hold nearest and dearest to us as part of our own church experience is in fact coming out of our own cultural milieu.

While the entire world has changed around every generation, the younger generations have little to no memory of what life was like “before.” We have either grown up in “exile” or hardly remember “living in Jerusalem” (i.e. Christendom). We need to equip our people to reach today's world; not the way it used to be, but the world that it has become. Addressing the issues people are experiencing and the questions they are asking in their particular age and/or life stage, makes our faith relevant to our lives, and our lives relevant to our faith.

We need to come with humility, ready to listen to the needs of those who are conditioned by today's culture where:

- Acceptance and tolerance are valued above all else (thus the absolute truth at the core of Christian orthodoxy is perceived as “judgmental” and unloving)
- Fluid sexuality and gender have become normalized
- Tech, social media, and screens dominate our days
- Anxiety, hopelessness, and isolation abound

The Barna Group identified what Gen-Z disciples need to be formed resilient followers of Christ given the above cultural factors. They had five recommendations, the first of which is also the most primary:

- *Experiencing Jesus*: Clear religious clutter; pursue closeness with and joy in Christ
- *Meaningful intergenerational relationships*: Dedicated to other believers they want to be around and to become
- *Cultural discernment*: Participate in robust learning community under the authority of Bible in order to wisely navigate an accelerated, complex culture
- *Vocational discipleship*: Know and live God’s calling, especially in the area of work; align ambition with God’s purposes
- *Countercultural mission*: Serve as a faithful presence in the world, trusting in God’s power and living differently from cultural norms

While The Barna Group was especially focused on forming resilient Gen-Z disciples in this study, these five elements are embedded into our new discipleship model because it is important for a person of any age in this day and age to be formed in this way. Even though older millennials and some Gen X’ers were not born and raised in this morally relativistic “post-everything” culture, we are also increasingly conditioned and pressured by it. It often makes us feel fearful and uncertain how to share our faith, even as we are called to be a faithful presence in the world through living on mission in a counter cultural way.

We must equip people with a biblical and theological worldview in an age when moral relativism prevails. This not only prepares us to navigate our own challenges, but also readies us to reach those outside the church with what faith has to offer. Content partnerships such as the one we have already rolled out with RightNow Media helps us to have relevant content to address the manifold questions that people have at their age and stage of life. This also enables us to move away from a one-size fits all discipleship strategy. D-Groups can choose the curriculum that will best help them grow in experiencing closeness with Jesus. Small group leaders can choose 1-2 guides per year that they think would most effectively form their flock.

While we don’t necessarily need more intergenerational programs, we do need to involve other generations in service to each other (e.g. the youth serving with VBS, mentor parents coming alongside new parents) in a way that will build more intergenerational relationships.

Strategy 5: Missional (Re)orientation

Emphasize helping people own the “forward and outward” mission of the church to be *Here to Serve*, partnering with Outreach in order to shift the FPC culture.

Though “forward and outward” is already the missional priority, our ecclesiology informs us that the mission of God is our very reason for being as a church. Therefore, in order for us to collectively embrace our mission as the people of God, this becomes critical to our formation.

With top-level alignment on priorities through pathway, our programs and events will serve priorities. Rather than submit events separately, we discuss as a staff team the key moments of the year and how we can partner on them. Events/programs are strategically arranged to create lead-up and follow-up opportunities with outreach. For example, we will develop a church-wide rhythm of preparing for ALPHA. Imagine every community group beginning to shift their focus in the weeks leading up to ALPHA to be praying about who to invite, creating intentional safe spaces for their neighbors and colleagues, offering outreach-friendly programming.

We also need to continue to hold outreach front and center and equipping people to share their faith in their everyday lives. Missional content will continue to feature in small groups, D-Groups, Sunday schools, and sermon series.

Our worship services can sharpen the liturgy and “sending moment” to continue to teach people that God is sending them into the world.

Appendix A: Church, Culture, and Context

Why do we need a new discipleship model for this day and age?

In *Resilient Faith: How the Early Christian 'Third Way' Changed the World*, Gerald Sittser notes the critical juncture at which the North American church finds itself:

Our cultural memory of the past might actually be keeping us from seeing the changes happening before our very eyes and from adapting creatively to them. The best hours of Western Christianity might be ahead of us, not behind us, assuming we dare to think differently about what it means to be Christian and to live as Christians in a culture that is changing. But our worst days could be ahead of us, too. There is no guarantee that Christianity in America will regain its strength or, even better, discover and follow a better way forward. There are other examples in history of the irreversible decline of Christianity in regions where it was once strong.

It is of paramount importance that we focus on equipping the people of FPC where they are already going, where they live, play, work, and worship. We need to address the issues people are experiencing and the questions they are asking in their particular age and/or life stage. That is what makes our faith relevant to our lives, and our lives relevant to our faith. That is what will help us take advantage of what we have been saying for so long: God placed FPC here, at 5300 Main Street, for a reason.

We need to captivate the hearts and imagination of the people of God with the kingdom of God, which can transform science, medicine, art, commerce, and culture. We need to equip them with the heart postures and the practices that will cultivate God's flourishing in the places He is already sending them.

Are we willing to change the way we "do discipleship" in order to form people who follow Jesus, are being transformed by Jesus, and who live out the mission of Jesus for the sake of others? Are we willing to help resource the church where critical gaps exist?

Does being "relevant" mean that the church is conceding to culture?

Simply put: no. The gospel doesn't change. ECO's Essential Tenets are not changing. However, the culture has changed and continues to change. Therefore, how we become a faithful presence and countercultural witness must also adapt.

We need to adopt the posture of church planters and missionaries; they recognize that in order to effectively carry the gospel where God is sending them, they need to listen to the people and the community to which they have been sent. This is the missiological principle of contextualization:

Contextualization attempts to communicate the Gospel in word and deed and to establish the church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context, presenting Christianity *in such a way that it meets people's deepest needs and penetrates their worldview*, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their own culture.

- Darrell Whiteman, Founder of *Global Development*, missiological training and discipleship development

It is no longer sufficient to “just teach the Bible” and trust that people will be able to figure out how to apply the Bible to their own lives. Instead, we must help them form a biblical and theological worldview so they understand how to engage the world around them and their purpose in God’s redemptive plan. Our principles of formation are rooted in the Bible and also aware of our present day context. As the culture forming us has changed, we need to adapt how we respond and equip people with a *countercultural* witness, to form them in Christ with the tools they need.

Ed Stetzer, the Billy Graham Distinguished Chair of Church, Mission, and Evangelism at Wheaton College, authored a 2016 article for *Christianity Today* that posits the church has four possible responses to the shifting cultural landscape: conforming, checking out, combating, and countering. He rightly argues for a solid and steadfast biblical foundation, missional living, and the heart of evangelism when he espouses:

Countering culture means engaging culture with conviction and compassion. We stand firmly on the truth of God, empowered by the Spirit, to extend the love of Christ to the world. Our desire isn’t to conquer but to redeem. It matters what we do, how we do it, and why we do it.

The reformed view of Christ’s relationship to culture is as the one who transforms culture. In Richard Niebuhr’s classic *Christ & Culture*, he presents five views on how to relate and engage with culture. Christ as the redeemer or transformer of culture is the view held by Calvin and Augustine, as well as the view held by our church. As Christ’s body, we are called to share his relationship to culture, and to participate in its redemptive transformation.

As NT Wright describes how this plays out in *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*:

You are—strange though it may seem, almost as hard to believe as the resurrection itself—accomplishing something that will become in due course part of God’s new world...That is the logic of the mission of God. God’s recreation of his wonderful world, which began with the resurrection of Jesus and continues mysteriously as God’s people live in the risen Christ and in the power of his Spirit, means that what we do in Christ and by the Spirit in the present is not wasted. It will last all the way into God’s new world. In fact it will be enhanced there.

This is the mission of the church that we must form our people to understand.

The unchanging mission of the church. The church is *here* to glorify God, to participate in His mission to seek and save the lost, and to cultivate the flourishing of His creation. When we commit to this, we will choose to sacrifice our own comfort for the sake of His kingdom. Our focus is meant to be on exalting God as a people of God, *together* glorifying him. 1 Peter 2:5 describes believers as “living stones” that are “being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

Participating in the mission of God is the church’s reason for being. As our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20c) and we are ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20), we consider our lives on earth in light of an eternal horizon: God’s mission of creation, redemption, restoration, and consummation. In *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission*, theologian and missiologist David Bosch declares: “Mission is understood as being derived from the very nature of God.” He grounds this in the truth that God is in fact a sending God: just as God the Father sent the Son, and God the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit, so too does the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit empower and send the church into the world (Acts 2).

Bosch corrects a major misconception when he says: “It is not the church which ‘undertakes’ mission; it is the *missio Dei* which constitutes the church.” This marks a recovery of the essence of *being* the people of God as a church body, away from Christendom, away from the attractional church model. Participating in the mission of God is the church’s very reason for being.

Similarly, in *Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements*, missional strategist Alan Hirsch describes a missional church as a community of God’s people “that defines itself and organizes its life around its real purpose of being an agent of God’s mission to the world. In other words, the church’s true and authentic organizing principle is mission. *When the church is on mission, it is the true church.* The church itself is not only a product of that mission but is obligated and destined to extend it by whatever means possible. The mission of God flows directly through every believer and every community of faith that adheres to Jesus.”

The mission of God is the mission of every believer, and every gathering of believers. Only when we are living to bring God’s light to those around us are we living as we are called to live, are we fulfilling our design. Just as God made Adam and Eve in his image, complete with a mandate to be fruitful and multiply, just as He made Abraham to be a blessing for the nations (Genesis 12:3), just as God graciously liberated the Israelites from slavery and told them they were to be to him a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6): reaching the nations has always been part and parcel of the gospel metanarrative. Although it can be intimidating to begin to step out in faith to share our faith, believers will discover a joy and a sense of fulfillment deeper than any other when living according to God’s design.

Indeed, from the very beginning of our journey to follow Jesus, we are more than qualified to invite others to come and see, just as Philip invited Nathanael (John 1:46) and as Andrew brought Peter (1:42). We are called and commissioned by Jesus, who has all authority under heaven and earth, to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that Jesus has commanded (Matthew 28:18-20).

In *Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication*, Craig Ott and Gene Wilson offer this fitting description of the kingdom-minded church family that we seek to embody:

Kingdom communities are congregations of Christians who embody and live out kingdom values as Jesus taught them. Their essence is found first in their relationship to the King, Jesus Christ, and second in their obedience to the will of the King explicitly stated in the Scriptures. Simply stated: they are Christ-centered and Bible-based [and growing in holiness by the work of the Holy Spirit].

Kingdom communities become a transforming, *countercultural* witness and movement having an impact on persons, families, communities, cities, and nations. The power of the gospel becomes active in them, and they become the salt of the earth and light of the world. No church is perfect or without sin, but every church should be a sign and foretaste of the kingdom of God.

We want to become this kind of kingdom community, and live out the Great Commission and the Greatest Commandment.

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20)

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The Greatest Commandment (Mark 12:28-31; cf. Matthew 22:34-40)

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

Appendix B: Example Alignment Plan for Children & Family Ministry

Children & Family developed strategies that directly address bringing greater alignment with the rest of the church in regards to its ecclesiology, the discipleship pathway, resourcing gaps, and relevant faith; missional formation is woven into all of them.

Strategy 1: Clarify Church Engagement

Engage parents in the spiritual development of their children, both at the church and at home. This requires creating a clear overview of church engagement and equipping milestones, so that they understand how their involvement with the Children & Family ministry equips them as parents

- **Initiative:** Designate and maintain a group/class for parents of younger children that meets EVERY Sunday while children are in Sunday School. Organized and equipped by the Parent Development Director.
- **Initiative:** Offer another class where they get biblical teaching that is not necessarily parent-specific. Parents need a Sunday morning group/class that they can graduate into as they grow spiritually, or if they prefer to delve into other topics during the discipleship hour. As their children graduate into Middle and High School, these parents will need community and support as they navigate new challenges in parenting older children.

Strategy 2: Discipleship Pathway for Parents

Engage parents in their own spiritual development, especially around pressing parenting challenges, so that they feel that they are being equipped. This requires creating a well-defined pathway of doing discipleship, per the church-wide formation strategy, that also includes parent-specific developmental opportunities.

- **Initiative:** Create formalized milestones, visible to parents.
 - Baptism (infant)
 - Worship with Kids Workshop (Kinder)
 - Children's Choir (4 years-5th Grade; Youth choir)
 - Bible Sunday (1st Grade)
 - Communion Workshop (K-5th Grade)
 - Walk through the Bible
 - Preteen graduation to MS
- **Initiative:** Offer stage specific check-ins/trainings
 - Re-brand Parenting Beginnings as a 6-week series for parents who are expecting or with kids up to five years old
 - CFM leads developmental training for specific ages. CFM provides material through adult class visits, Sunday School teacher trainings, media presentations for online campus.

- CFM will continue to make curriculum available to parents at all times but expand the venues of communication.
- **Initiative:** Highlight service opportunities that parents could do with children at each developmental stage. Serving together creates strong family bonding through experientially living out their faith.

Strategy 3: Address Gaps in Formation and Outreach

Collaborate with a new director of parent development to better resource parents with a relevant discipleship hour experience and additional ongoing equipping opportunities, including how to build relationships with non-Christian families.

Strategy 4: Discipleship Pathway for Kids

Teach parents what developmental milestones to expect so they know what “success” looks like and what their goals should be for forming their children. These are essentially the “marks of a disciple,” adapted for age and developmental stage, incorporating the same ideas about head, heart, and hands.

- Childcare: Safety and Love (0-2 years)
 - Parents should feel welcome to bring children of any age with them to corporate worship. However, at this age, a childcare setting is probably easier for toddlers and less stressful for their parents so that they might focus on their own spiritual development.
 - Children this age live only to be served. (Although they give us smiles and giggles—and help us recover childlike joy and wonder.)
- Introducing God as Creator (3-4 years)



- Parents should be able to identify significant adults who support and care for their child within the community, who know the child’s name and greets them upon sight.
- Church activities and events help children learn that God created them, cares for them, loves them.
- They experience God’s love through the care and actions of Christians.
- Some children will be able to attend a worship service comfortably at this age. They will gain a sense of community, be known by multiple generations, start to absorb the songs and rhythms of worship. They will need activities such as coloring or manipulatives to help them. However, many children will not be able to tolerate sitting in one place and being quiet for an hour yet. It is perfectly reasonable for parents to choose to use childcare for children this age during worship.



- Shown the Bible
- Told Bible stories
- Play Bible stories
- Safe and appropriate service opportunities for this age are few outside of the family. A good place to start is thinking about how to bless others, such as by drawing a picture for grandparents and other family members and friends.

- Learning about Jesus (5-8 years):



- Connection to caring adults and youth role models are essential.
- At this age (Kinder and older) children are able to attend worship services. They will still need activities they can do to help them remain in place, especially the younger elementary students. They will gain a sense of community, be known by multiple generations, start to absorb the songs and rhythms of worship. They can begin to engage with the service with encouragement from their parents - singing simple or familiar refrains, learning the Apostle's Creed, looking up the Scripture, etc.



- For some of the younger children who have learning differences or children with special needs this might still be a difficult setting. Accommodations could be made if needed for childcare or programming for children with special needs during worship.
- They are concrete thinkers so Jesus is easy to introduce and talk about.
- Draw them to a main point that should almost always be about Jesus' love for them. Jesus' example for living. Jesus the Savior.
- "Kid world" applications are very important. Put it in their context.
- Bible stories need to be simplified. Skip the gory details—anything you wouldn't let them watch in a movie. They will be distracted and frightened.



- Practicing. Experimental. Active, experiential learning.
- Children this age can begin to be more engaged with service opportunities. However, there are still few choices outside of family and the church that are safe and concern appropriate subject matter. Within the church, they can assist a parent with greeting and ushering. Outside of the church:
 - Houston Welcomes Refugees offers opportunities for children to accompany their parents to provide hospitality and friendship to families and children as they settle into their new context.

- Plant With Purpose educates children about earth stewardship, financial gifting, and resourcing people in other countries to develop sustainable business practices.

- Learning about the Holy Spirit (9-10 years/Preteen)



- It is completely appropriate to expect children this age to be able to participate in corporate worship. They may refer to the sermon as “boring.” Apologies to the pastors! At this age, children may not relate to some of the sermon material and most of them will not be able to focus for 20-30 minutes of a listening only activity such as a sermon or lecture. Given materials to engage their bodies (coloring, drawing, creative items they can manipulate) they will follow some of the sermon. Especially if they hear illustrations and references that are familiar or about younger people. Discuss as a family.
- Connection to caring adults and youth role models are essential.
- Given the opportunity to speak freely, shares opinions and experiences.
- Learning compassion and caring for others. Empathy.
- Recognizes when things are not right. Desires to improve.
- Forgives others and self.
- They start having crazy hormonal energy and no idea how to manage it. Their bodies grow too fast and they are suddenly awkward in them.
- Very self-conscious. Desperate to fit in but also stand out. Fearful of public shaming or being perceived as childish
- A preteen disciple is familiar with the Trinity, the Bible, the rhythms of worship.
- Asks questions, notices new elements, owns their faith. Makes new connections and discoveries. Learning to apply.
- Actively living out their values in school and in their interactions with others.
- Still fairly wrapped up in themselves, but starting to glimpse how they affect the world around them—and why it matters.
- Preteens are eager to serve in and outside of the church. The VBS Mission Camp gives them a different place and way to serve each day. Sunday morning Preteen class has a regular rhythm of “Servant Sunday” where they focus on a mission project they can learn about or do during Sunday School. Great options include:
 - Food Bank: swift and enthusiastic food sorters and packers.
 - Pre-K Sunday School: Preteens get to use what they have learned to bring a Bible story to the Pre-K students.
 - Ushering and Greeting



- Youth helper for VBS
- Houston Welcomes Refugees: as they grow, they are more able to help organize and assist their parents as well as befriend children in the families being served.

Appendix C: Alignment Plan for Youth Ministry

Youth Formation Strategies

We plan to continue our current formation strategy for the youth, which is working really well—with one exception: we want to see youth more integrated into the life of the church and the church more involved in their lives. This has to do with the Foundational Ecclesiology strategy. To align the youth ministry with our ecclesiology, we suggest these strategies. They are interrelated in that the more we reach out to parents, involve youth in the worship liturgy, help facilitate more intergenerational relationships, and offer more opportunities for the youth to serve and be served, the more connected the youth will be into the life of the church.

Strategy 1: Integrate Children & Youth into leading corporate worship.

- *Children & Youth staff participate in the worship and service planning process*
- *Youth liturgists participate in the worship service once a month.* The youth staff would recruit and prepare the students. Even the act of recruiting the students to be involved helps them see that they are wanted and valued.
- *The church devotes resources to parent outreach.* For kids to come to worship, we need their parents to be participating. For approximately two-thirds of kids in the youth group, their parents are not a part of FPC.

Strategy 2: *Create more opportunities for intergenerational relationships, formed by serving and being served.*

Strategy 3: Collaborate with Children & Family, Discipleship, Community, Outreach, and the Parent Development Director to equip FPC parents to reach out to the unreached parents of youth group kids.

Strategy 1: *For youth to be more integrated into the life of the church, particularly with corporate worship, we propose:*

- *Children & Youth staff participate in the worship and service planning process*
 - The children's director and youth director or someone from the youth staff participates in the sermon series planning process to help make sermons more relevant for the youth
 - For example, the youth staff does "feed forward" rather than feedback for our weekly sermons, which has helped us tremendously in coming up with meaningful applications. We can proactively provide "feed forward" via email or in person each week, but this will be more effective if the preacher gives us the main homiletical idea.

- *Youth liturgists participate in the worship service once a month.* The youth staff would recruit and prepare the students. Even the act of recruiting the students to be involved helps them see that they are wanted and valued.
 - Students can lead the call to worship, the prayer of confession and assurance, and the prayers of the people.
 - Students read the Scripture regularly during the worship service. When we've done this in the past, students loved seeing their friends get up there and read. It helped them see their role and participation in worship rather than just watching it all happen!
 - Create opportunities for students to briefly share testimonies or update on what is going on in their lives/youth ministry during Sunday worship. Easy to do, helps the church see what's going on and perhaps inspires them to get involved. Also lets the students see how supportive the church is of what is going on.
 - For example, after Christmas a student could give a quick update/report of the ski trip for the church!
 - Show congregation videos of trips
 - Youth choir
- *Devote resources to parent outreach.* For kids to come to worship, we need their parents to be participating. For approximately two-thirds of kids in the youth group, their parents are not a part of FPC. We need to create a culture of FPC parents reaching out to those who are outside the church, and we need a staff person to help equip the FPC parents to do this, creating an outwardly-focused parent culture and community.

Strategy 2: *For the youth to be more integrated into the life of the church, they need more intergenerational relationships:*

- Recruit more committed FPC adult leaders during the discipleship hour and the Wednesday night small groups who are actively engaged in the life of FPC and participate in corporate worship every week. The leaders then continually invite kids to worship and engage the topics that came up during the worship service during the week.
- Engage more lay leaders in College Prep/Oakdale Project seminars or Sunday morning discipleship hour, outside of the usual youth small group leaders. This creates more connections to those who are not already involved in the youth community, a chance for the leaders to see that they have something to offer (and to receive) by getting involved. Creates the starting point for more relationships with more adults in the congregation for the youth.
- Collaborate with other departments to develop a career-shadowing day, where students get to shadow professionals in the FPC congregation in potential areas of interest/vocational calling. (Potentially MSF grads). Since this might affect choice of college/university for students, we would encourage high schoolers to participate during their sophomore or junior years.

- Ideally, the new young adults pastor could create a similar college internship program for college kids on a summer or winter break that interested high schoolers could also join.
- Involve youth to serve within the church, as greeters, liturgists, or with children & family, such as VBS, or join service projects outside the church alongside other FPC groups.

Strategy 3: *For the youth to be more involved in the life of the church, children, youth, and adult discipleship must collaborate with outreach to reach out to parents.*

- Create role for Parent Development Director
 - Use key moments in the youth journey/ministry year to reach out to/create events for the parents:
 - Graduating up to 6th grade from the CFM
 - Confirmation for 8th grade students
 - Joining a small group as a freshman in high school
 - Oakdale project for juniors and seniors
 - Youth Sunday (8th grade confirmands and seniors),
 - Trips and retreats: Ski trip, fall and spring retreats, summer mission trips and adventure trips.
 - Hold a gathering with all parents at FPC, in collaboration with children & family, adult discipleship, and outreach. Would bring all of the parents together at the church (babies through HS). So many parents have commented that they want to know what the “next stage” looks like (challenges, obstacles and wisdom). Panels from parents, speakers, breakout groups for specific ages, and so on.