

Learning

Spirit gives life

Continuing the theme of the abundant life, at this stage we want young people to realize and experience how the Holy Spirit as guide, comforter, and helper is where true life is found. By being a follower of Jesus we are promised the presence of the Spirit in our life, who then leads us to participating in the Kingdom of God. When we allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit we find ourselves being a blessing to the culture around us instead of being conformed to what the culture tries to mold us into. A Spirit led life also is a life that works for justice following the model that Jesus demonstrated for us in caring for those on the margins of society.

Overall in this stage we are hoping young people will be growing in wisdom. The challenges and temptations that teenagers face in today's fast paced world can be overwhelming at times, and while we can't protect them from all those challenges (which wouldn't be healthy either) we can be mentors and guides helping them navigate through the tough times and celebrating with them the good times. We strive to demonstrate in this stage how important community is and the value of connecting ourselves with other Jesus followers who are also striving to follow the path of wisdom and compassion.

We believe the local church is a vital place for this kind of community and a great place to spur one another on towards a life well lived. It is in this community where we hope teens will start to discern what God is calling them towards now and into the future.

Experiences

Profession

In prior stages this is where we have discussed the sacraments of our church, but when we come to the youth stage and profession of faith, we are not talking about a sacrament, which is really focused on God's grace to us, but we are now looking at our response back to God. Profession of faith is what we call the step when someone decides to announce to the church and to God that Jesus is their Lord and Savior. It is an outward expression of what is going on inwardly in a person. In our church we do not suggest that there is one exact time or age that this needs to happen since it is about each person's faith and their response to God. All of our programs and interactions with a child we hope are helpful in leading someone to this decision but we want it to be their decision and not something that is just done out of expectation.

When someone feels like they are ready for this step, we ask that they meet with a couple of our Elders who discuss their faith with them and do so in a way that is age appropriate. If they have not been baptized yet, that would happen concurrently with the profession of faith.

Discerning wisdom through mentors

In the younger years the children watch others and learn by example, and then they learn more from teachers in the elementary years, but then there comes this next stage where we are trying to develop young people who are able to discern wisdom for themselves. As youth we are hoping to help them take ownership of their faith journey in a new and deeper way and so we see the adults in their lives more as mentors to help be a guide alongside them. Sometimes this may be very defined by having a couple youth meet with an adult mentor, but it also is referring to the many interactions and relationships that we want our youth to have with a variety of adults in our church family.

Serving

Obviously serving is not something that can only be done when a child becomes a teenager but it is around this time when we look to see youth serving more without the need of having a parent along

side. This could happen with their peers in youth group or they may feel a call to a certain kind of service or ministry that they really want to invest in on their own.

A couple of key places where youth can benefit a great deal from is in serving those that are different than them and also in serving their church family. In serving someone who is 'other' maybe by their race, economic standing, intellect, or age; youth are able to break down walls that naturally get built up when we stay too long in our own comfort zones. Going out and being with someone different than us gives us new ways to grow in understanding, compassion, and empathy.

Serving the church body is also important in the faith development of a teen. When they can take ownership and responsibility for serving inside their own church, teens can start to take better ownership of their own faith and standing in the family of believers.

Integrate faith and life

One of the key overarching themes of our faith in Christ is how our faith affects our whole life. We hope that the teens growing up in our church family see through example, teaching, and mentoring, that faith is not just one compartment of a fully packed life. We want to help them understand that their faith in Jesus is the one thing that gives them new eyes to see the rest of their life. So helping them understand how faith affects how they are a student, son/daughter, friend, athlete, musician, citizen, etc. is an important part of this stage of life.

One way we talk of this throughout MRC is by striving to live a 'missional life'. Our vision of loving God, loving neighbor, and leading change is more than just something we add on to a busy life, but it is a way of living that is always looking to be a part of the mission of God who is reconciling the world to Himself. We are then called to participate in that mission which includes God reconciling to people, people reconciling to each other, people reconciling with the earth, and also people reconciling with themselves.

Programs to accomplish above

Youth Groups

We have both a middle school group and a high school group. We hope youth bring their excitement and their questions and find a place here where they are welcomed and encouraged to search for answers to the big questions they have. Our volunteers may not have the answers all the time, but they will care for your youth and share with them the great news of God's love for them.

Retreats

A big part of our youth ministries are the retreats that we participate in every year. The middle school group attends a winter weekend retreat every year at one of the great camps close to us here in Michigan. The high school group often has two retreats a year. One in the fall to help the students bond and then also a winter retreat that is in a large group setting. Retreats are a great way to have some time away from the busyness and challenges of school and home where students can have meaningful growth, not only in their relationship with God, but also with each other and the caring volunteers.

Mission Trips

High school students have the chance to attend a mission trip every summer. These trips are great opportunities to have a chance to step outside of one's comfort zone and be stretched by not only serving others but also by learning from those that are different from us. We don't come to these trips with any kind of superiority "let us fix you" complex, but we go on these trips because we know we will be impacted by what we encounter and the people we will meet and learn from. Just in the past few

years we have taken trips to Kentucky, Minneapolis, New York, and Chicago. We are planning an inter-generational international trip to serve in Haiti in June of this summer.

At home practices

Prayer journals

At this stage of growth we hope the child/youth is developing their own prayer practices. Prayers together as a family still stay important but they are likely not quite as willing to share everything on their heart with Mom or Dad. Giving them a prayer journal can be a way to encourage them in their personal prayer time. What's a prayer journal? It can be as simple as a blank notebook for your teen to have a place to write down what's on their heart. For inspiration check out the Psalms.

Bible study

Devotionals are good tools to help your child apply the Bible to their life but also now as they become a teen they are more capable of reading the Bible and discerning meaning and application for themselves. One of the best way to encourage this practice in your teen is for them to see you practicing this discipline yourself.

Serving together

A great way to bond as a family and to bond over shared values is by serving together. This may take the form of the whole family going on a mission trip or maybe just your teen and you serving together at the local food pantry. Once again, the best way to develop these disciplines in your children is by demonstrating them yourselves on a regular basis and sharing why it's important to you with your kids.

Practicing Justice

Beyond serving together, teens are also at a stage where they are ready to stand up for what they think is right and important. Encourage them and work with them as they search for things they would like to give their time and energy to. Helping our teens to see that there are people on the margins of society that need someone to speak out for them and to work for them is an important part of raising them in the way of the Kingdom.