

Youth & Family Ministries

Ministry Handbook



Reformation Presbyterian Church
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WELCOME TO THE YOUTH & FAMILY MINISTRY AT RPC

We are very excited to have your student participate in the Youth Ministry of RPC. RPC's Youth Ministry is comprised of the Middle School (6th – 8th grade) and the Sr. High (9th – 12th grades). These are formative years in the lives of our students. As they grow physically, we desire for them to grow spiritually as well. We want our students to know Jesus, grow in his grace, and learn how to serve him in all of life.

This brief handbook on the RPC Youth Ministry is designed to give parents, staff, and volunteers a basic overview of our philosophy of ministry, as well as various policies that give protections for our youth and leaders.

WHAT IS A PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY?

A Philosophy of Ministry (POM) is a set of ministry principles based on theological truths that direct the way we plan and carry out ministry. Every church has a POM — held either consciously or unconsciously—by which they make choices about ministry. Like everything else in the Christian life, gospel ministry must be directed by the word of God. Therefore, it is our objective to let God's truth decide the principles upon which our ministry practice is established. Our concern is to be driven by biblical principles rather than the 'latest thoughts on youth ministry' or personal preferences.

OUR PHILOSOPHY OF YOUTH & FAMILY MINISTRY

VALUES: What biblical values direct our youth & family ministry?

- Youth ministry should be Christ-centered, Holy Spirit dependent, means of grace oriented, and relationally focused.
- Youth ministry upholds, supports, and encourages the God-given role of parents to spiritually nurture their children, and seeks to partner with families for the spiritual growth of their children.
- Youth ministry should participate in the body life of the church and benefit the overall ministry of the church.
- Youth ministry should connect students with parents and mature Christian adults in order to prepare them for mature Christian living.
- Youth ministry seeks to develop boys into men of God and girls into women of God.
- Youth ministry seeks to develop students who have a heart for ministry to others through word and deed.
- Youth ministry should become an entry point for non-churched youth, and provide a loving environment and biblical instruction for those who lack Christian families.
- Youth ministry should recognize the personal, educational, and social differences of our students which require a variety of ministry settings.

VISION: What is the vision for youth & family ministry?

Ultimately, we want to grow strong Christ-centered families that raise children to become mature

Christians—Christians who will be ready to leave home to serve Christ in the world. It is not our desire to create a youth group that is a ‘ministry of its own’ — separate from the main church body. Instead, we believe that God wants his covenant children to be raised and nurtured to know Christ in the context of the family and the whole body of the church. Therefore, our youth ministry exists to assist, support, and encourage families of RPC and the community in developing young men and women with a heart for God. We seek to provide a ministry context in which students encounter the Lord Jesus Christ and his saving grace in a multi-generational community of Christian love and spiritual maturity. Our prayer is that students will learn to walk by faith in Jesus and by his grace grow into mature young men and women who know how to live and serve in the body of Christ and the community (Psalm 144:12).

GOALS: What goals should the ministry pursue in the lives of students?

The following goals are the ‘spiritual fruit’ produced when students walk by faith in Christ and are equipped with a heart to serve him. These goals help us to measure the progress of every individual and the group as a whole.

- Worship of the triune God — Possessing a heart to praise God out of gratitude for his grace.
- Growth in Grace — Growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ through the means of grace.
- Fellowship and Service — Developing spiritual bonds with believers of all ages and putting faith into action by serving the needs of others.
- Evangelism and Missions — Out of a heart for God, making Jesus known by word and deed to others inside and outside the church.
- Biblical World and Life View — Learning to think and live as a disciple of Christ in all of life.

MEANS: How do people change?

Gospel of Grace: True gospel ministry is about heart transformation, not simply behavior modification. Christian growth comes only through faith in Christ who redeems us from sin and transforms our lives. By faith in Jesus Christ we are united to him and receive all his saving benefits: justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification. Therefore, we proclaim Christ and his grace in order for people to know and grow in him.

Means of Grace: People come to faith in Christ and grow in Christ through God appointed means. We call them the means of grace – or the means through which God chooses to communicate the gospel of grace. They are scripture, prayer, and sacraments.

MODEL: What is the structure of our ministry?

We call our activities ‘Avenues of Ministry’. They are what we do. Each avenue has a unique atmosphere and strategy for ministry. These avenues, or gatherings of people, can be categorized according to size.

Avenues of Ministry:

- Large Group – gatherings of 20 or more in a public, non-threatening atmosphere
- Small Group – small gatherings of people in a more intimate setting
- One-to-one – personal encounters to build trust-confidence relationships

Jesus pursued meeting with people in these different contexts – large gatherings of people, small groups, one-to-one encounters. Our model of ministry is based on his earthly ministry.

In order to reach and equip students, these avenues of ministry function in two ways. First, they are the delivery system for the gospel. As such we use these avenues to:

- Gather students—intentional efforts to gather our own students and incorporate new students
- Relate to students—showing genuine love and concern; meeting needs; building trust; knowing students
- Teach students the truth of God’s word
- Model the truth to students

Second, our ‘avenues of ministry’ give us a context for living out the gospel together. We want the goals of the ministry to be visibly manifested in the lives of students. Therefore, we will plan events that help us achieve those goals (e.g. local service opportunities, bible studies, fellowship events, weekend retreats, short-term mission trips, learning life skills from adults, service opportunities in the church, etc.) Also, we want to use our avenues as a way of connecting students and adults/parents in ministry, so that students observe and learn from mature Christian adults. In all that we do, we expect parents and other adults to participate as vital role models of the Christian life.

As we plan our ministry events, we keep to the motto: ‘Fixed theology, flexible methodology.’ That means our avenues of ministry may change over time, but our POM does not.

PRESUPPOSITIONS: What biblical truths do we presuppose that shape what we do and why?

God is at work – Regardless of how things appear, we trust that God is sovereignly working to accomplish his purpose in this world, in the church, and in individual lives. We are also aware that Satan and his forces are battling against God and his people. Our job in ministry is to prayerfully depend upon God to change hearts and lives, and consider the work of the Holy Spirit as we seek to minister the gospel to individual lives.

The Family—Scripture clearly teaches that the primary responsibility for raising children falls upon parents. The family is to be a community of the gospel where the love of Christ is experienced and the truth of his word is taught. In particular, fathers are to function as the spiritual leaders of their families. Therefore, our youth ministry does not replace the role of parents, nor absolve parents of their God given duty. Instead, we seek to provide resources and ministry opportunities within the safe context of the church body that assist parents in the process of raising their children to know the Lord.

The Individual – Every person is made in God’s image and therefore has commonalities. However, every person is also created uniquely and shaped specifically by the providence of God. There is diversity of gifts, abilities, personality, idols of the heart, spiritual states, social groups, family life, education, socio-economic status, etc. Therefore, we do not have a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to ministry. Instead, we seek to know and minister to students as individuals.

Learning Process – The term ‘learning’ refers to the life-long process of spiritual growth. People learn through a divinely ordained process by which they come to understand and commit themselves to the truth in a unique and personal way. There are several implications of a right understanding of learning. 1) The Holy Spirit is sovereign over this process. Since learning occurs at different rates, in different ways, and at different times for different people, we expect that God will work differently in each student. 2) From a human perspective, people learn when they want to learn or have a need to learn. Students will develop questions about God and life in their own time. We want to help them find biblical answers to the questions they are asking by giving them an environment in which it is safe to ask questions and explore the claims of Christ. 3) True learning and spiritual growth is more than the impartation of biblical knowledge; it is more than behavior modification. True learning results in heart transformation through faith in Christ. Our understanding of this process guards us from giving false assurance to those who merely possess biblical knowledge rather than saving faith. It also gives us patience with students as they grow. 4) We believe people learn best when they hear the truth taught, see the truth modeled, put the truth into practice themselves, and receive encouragement for their faithfulness. Our students need to experience a community in which adults live out their faith with love and integrity, as well as have opportunities to put their faith into practice. 5) Recognizing the dynamics of the learning process necessitates that we distinguish broad age groups for educational purposes.

The Church – The Church is the people of God by faith in Jesus Christ. The Church is Jesus’s body and dwelling place, the bride of Christ, the guardian of truth, the family of God, and the institution through which he accomplishes his mission. The elders are called to shepherd the spiritual lives of our covenant children and include them in our ministry plans. Sadly, many young people leave the church just after leaving home. It is our prayer that our children and youth will embrace Christ by faith at an early age and commit themselves to his church. We want our youth to know that RPC is not only their parent’s church, but their church too. Therefore, our youth ministry seeks to assimilate students into the life of the whole church in order that they might be built-up in Christ through the body. Also, the church should be a safe place for students to ask questions and struggle to work out their faith, to have their fledgling faith tested and proven genuine before going into the world, to develop godly relationships with their peers, to learn to put others first, and to be trained for adult Christian living. Finally, we seek to help high school graduates find their place in the church as they transition into adulthood (places to serve, ways to participate, relational connections, etc.).

Incarnational Ministry – God is a relational God and in the gospel he reconciles sinners to himself. The Son of God is Immanuel (‘God with us’) who became incarnate as the perfect God-man. He entered this world and our lives. He walked in our steps. He knows our sorrows and joys. He

continues that incarnational ministry today through his people who enter into people's lives with the healing powers of Christ. We are the hands and feet of Christ. The love of Jesus is best communicated through relationships in which the truth and love of the gospel is demonstrated by the way we live and speak. Therefore, the gospel becomes most powerful when God's people are intentional to share their lives with the youth in our church. It is important to remember the motto 'more is caught than taught'. After all, our youth breathe in the spiritual air that we breathe out.

Demographics – Every community has its own demographic. Our ministry in Hendersonville, NC should be shaped by the types of people, environment, culture, and structures of our community. In addition, our church demographics (including members, staff, atmosphere, worship, etc.) effects our ministry. As a result, our youth ministry will look different than other churches, even churches that have the same POM.

OUR POLICIES FOR YOUTH MINISTRY

These policies are designed to provide safeguards for everyone involved in the ministry and to help the ministry run smoothly.

ABUSE PREVENTION

Any individual member or staff of Reformation Presbyterian Church may apply to work with children and youth. All interested persons are required to complete an application, background check, sign the Workers' Pledge, and adhere to the safety policy. The Session, in consultation with ministry staff, has the right to approve or disapprove individuals to work with children and youth.

Signs of Affection: Adult leaders shall not touch, interact with, or otherwise communicate with children/youth in any way that is intended to be sexually stimulating. Common expressions of affection (hugs), affirmation (pats on the back), support (prayers), or physical caretaking (changing diapers, toileting, etc.) are appropriate in this community of caring Christians. Care must be taken, however, that expressions of affection and affirmation are not excessive or imposed upon a child/youth. Care must also be taken that adults do not act in a sexually stimulating way toward one another in front of children or youth during any church activity.

Two Adult Rule: Persons involved in the custody and care of children at RPC should observe the "two adult rule," which requires an adult working with children to be accompanied by another adult worker. The "two adult rule" should be followed whenever possible. If only one adult is present in a room of children or youth, classroom doors must be left open. Multiple adult chaperones are required for all special events for children and youth held at times and locations other than church-wide gatherings.

Observation: Parents or legal guardians are welcome to observe any activity at any time involving their child. Adults are encouraged to be sensitive to the potential for abuse and mindful of appearances of abuse. They should not hesitate to caution others if they observe activities which are, or might be, inappropriate. Adults who observe questionable or inappropriate behavior affecting youth must report it as soon as possible to the pastor or an elder.

One-on-One Supervision: Adult leaders are never to be alone with someone of the opposite gender (including car rides). If a one-to-one meeting takes place between an adult leader and a student of the same gender, then the meeting must take place in a public area and with parental consent.

Online Communication: Online communication between students and adult leaders must be within biblical standards of what is appropriate (not sexually suggestive, crude, slanderous, etc.) and limited to what is necessary for ministry purposes.

BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS

Because of sin and the immaturity of youth, behavior problems among middle and high school students may occur. In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus lays out a roadmap for dealing with sin. We want to follow this passage in dealing with behavior problems that go beyond youthful immaturity and become disruptive or defiant.

- Following Matthew 18:15, a student who is behaving in a disruptive or defiant manner may be pulled aside by a youth leader for a one-to-one conversation in order to positively influence the student's attitude and correct the behavior. The leader will be positive in tone, assure the student that their presence is valued, and articulate clearly the expectations for behavior and consequences for non-compliance.
- A student who repeatedly acts in a disruptive or defiant manner may be asked to leave a ministry event. His/her parents will be notified of that action (Matthew 18:16). The student will be allowed to return to a subsequent event after agreeing to submit to the authority of the youth leaders.

DRESS POLICY

Students and leaders are required to dress in a manner that glorifies our Lord Jesus Christ and respects his people. The following are not permitted:

- Apparel with crude, racist, or otherwise offensive language printed.
- Clothing that is too revealing. In particular, two piece bathing suits for girls and Speedo style swim suits for guys are not permitted. Girls must wear one piece bathing suits or a colored T-shirt to cover a two piece bathing suit.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Students are permitted to bring cell phones (or other electronic devices) to youth ministry events. However, we ask that they not use them during activities or meetings. They quickly become a distraction and prevent students from learning how to engage others in conversation. If allowances need to be made in special cases, then parents should communicate with youth leaders regarding their student's needs.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Building relationships between adult leaders and students is important. A trusting relationship

requires a level of confidentiality, but not when it comes to matters of personal safety, immoral behavior, or criminal activity. In such cases, the leader will inform the student that they must communicate the matter to their parents. After a reasonable amount of time has been given, if the student refuses to talk with his/her parents, then the leader will communicate the matter to the parents. In some cases it may be preferable to communicate with the pastor first, and let him talk with the parents. Additionally, students will be encouraged to maintain an open dialogue with their parents.

PROMOTION TO HIGHER GRADE LEVEL

Students entering sixth grade will be promoted to the Middle School Sunday school class in August. Students entering ninth grade will be promoted to the Sr. High Sunday school class in August. Rising 6th and 9th graders are welcome to attend other ministry events beginning in June.

The grade level for youth at RPC will correspond to their grade level at school. We believe there are educational, social, and spiritual benefits to this policy. Also, the Pastor of Youth & Families will communicate with parents every year about the status of their child's educational needs, address any changes to their child's grade level, and if necessary, review the church policy.

COMMUNICATION

The church website (www.refpres.org) has some basic information regarding the Youth Ministry. Up-to-date information will be communicated via text messages and email.

VOLUNTEER LEADERS

The youth ministry seeks high parental and adult member involvement for two reasons. First, parents are primarily responsible for raising godly children. Second, since we want students to become mature Christian adults one day, they need multiple mature Christian adults in their lives. We ask all parents to pray for all the families of our church and leaders in the ministry.

There are several ways to volunteer with the youth ministry:

- Ministry volunteers—attends ministry functions regularly and assists with planning (e.g. teaching, playing music, leading a small group, playing music, etc.)
- Event volunteers—assists as a chaperone or helper for a particular event (e.g. hosting an event at your home, driving students to an event, providing snacks, teaching students a skill, etc.)

COMMUNICANT MEMBERSHIP

Rather than teaching a traditional age-based communicants class that puts expectations upon children to become professing Christians and communicant members at a particular age, we prefer for parents to instruct their children at home in order to help them make that step. Genuine faith is a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in his time. Therefore, the process of getting ready for a public profession of faith in Christ and communicant membership in the church should be tailored to the individual child.