To Do Justice And to Love Kindness And to Walk Humbly With Our God

United Methodist Youth Fellowship
Arapaho United Methodist Church
“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

_Micah 6:6-8_
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Part I – *The Theology of UMYF at Arapaho*

**OUR THEOLOGY OF ADOLESCENCE**

*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.*  
*Jeremiah 1:5*

The great prophetic tradition of ancient Israel is filled with call narratives, including Moses’ (Exodus 3), the boy Samuel’s (1 Samuel 3), and Isaiah’s (Isaiah 6). One of the most striking examples is the call of Jeremiah, whom the Lord knew and appointed a prophet before he was even born. When Jeremiah protests, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy” (1:6), God retorts: “Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you” (1:7-8).

Arapaho’s youth ministry assumes that *every* young person has a call from God and seeks to help them discern just what that call is.

David White, in his *Practicing Discernment With Youth: A Transformative Youth Ministry Approach*, provides an excellent summary of society’s changing views on adolescence since the Industrial Revolution. He asserts (in an extended quote worth citing almost in its entirety):

*Prior to the Industrial Revolution, children passed with relative ease into adulthood, given that their ability to work determined their status as adults. The work of pre-industrial young people, while strenuous, was at times fulfilling – connecting them to the earth, their creativity, the care and guidance of adults, and the common good of the community, and affording them a more central social role…Today adolescents’ entry to adulthood is interminably delayed by the demands of education, which functions in part to fit them for the market – as producers and consumers. In contrast with their earlier social roles, youth are now relegated to high schools and to media-driven peer culture that disconnect them from adult care and guidance, the common good, and many of their former contributions and commitments.¹*

The changing nature of society has altered the lives of young people in profound ways, removing them from significant adult interaction and placing them in an extended “holding” period until they are “ready” for the “adult world.”

The church has fallen into the trap that culture has set. For the past hundred years, Kenda Creasy Dean argues, the church has viewed adolescence (and adolescents) as “a deficient form of adulthood…people who are ‘missing something’ that the institutional church must ‘supply.’”2 The resulting models of youth ministry that operate under this particular theology of adolescence relegate youth groups to their own space in churches, with their own ministers and adult volunteers.

Dean picks up on the imagery of Stuart Cummings-Bond, calling this “the ‘One-Eared Mickey Mouse’ model of ministry…in which youth, isolated in an ‘ear’ on top of Mickey’s head, [have] only marginal contact with the rest of the body of Christ.”3 This isolated ear became, and sadly in many places remains, “a place where seminarians and new pastors ‘did time’ until they got a ‘real’ job; where youth hung out until something larger caught their attention; where volunteers and staff alike spent an average of eighteen months before they burned out, threw in the towel, or both.”4

Arapaho’s youth ministry rejects this objectification of youth as a “target” of ministry. Rather, youth are treated like every other Christian disciple; i.e., as individuals with unique talents, gifts, graces, and callings from God. Granted, they are at an earlier stage of development – intellectually, physically, and in terms of faith maturity. But they have calls from God, and our task is to guide their discernment process through traditional Christian practices and teachings (more on this below).

Consequently, we cannot treat them as less-than-adults, or in Dean’s words, as deficient adults. Paul did not treat Timothy that way: “Do not neglect the gift that is in you” (1 Timothy 4:14). The angel Gabriel did not treat Mary that way: “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you” (Luke 1:28). And as we saw at the opening of this section, the Lord himself did not treat Jeremiah that way, instead calling him before he was even born and prodding him to greatness long before he became an adult. Arapaho’s youth ministry is, simply, Christian ministry. Focused on the God revealed finally and fully in Jesus Christ, this model assumes that God has something in store right now for the young people we pastor, not in some yet-to-be-determined future.

**OUR VISION OF YOUTH MINISTRY**

There are lots of models of youth ministry, all of which seek to make the most of perhaps the most precious resource we have – the time of our young people. Here at Arapaho, our model might be called “Prophetic Christian Youth Ministry.” Our *Vision* is our ultimate goal, where we are going. Our *Mission* is how we intend to get there.

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4 Ibid., 212.
Our *Vision* is two-fold. First, we want to nurture the spiritual growth of the youth in our care, under the guidance of parents and adult leaders. Second, we want youth, under the guidance of parents and adult leaders, to learn how to be the church.

These goals are expressed in the following Vision Statement: *Arapaho UMYF is a fellowship of youth, parents, and adult leaders seeking to grow spiritually while learning how to be the church of Jesus Christ.* These two areas of focus merit a bit more explanation.

**Spiritual Growth**
In nature, if something is not growing, it is either dead or dying. So it is with faith. Everything we do in UMYF should, in some way, foster the spiritual growth of our kids. That can take many different forms, of course, some of which will be detailed below, and it is one of the two primary goals of our group.

**Being the Church**
Mentioned above is the traditional One-Eared Mickey Mouse model of youth ministry. In this model, youth are kind of a separate entity, doing their own thing. They have a great experience in the group, but when they grow up and graduate, they frequently drift from the church. Anecdotally, if we polled a group of our friends and neighbors, we might even find that the majority of people spend some time out of contact with the church between their own graduation from High School and the time they return, often in their later young adulthood, and often with children of their own.

The reason? They are looking for a church that looks and feels like their Youth Group, because it is the only church they’ve known. And of course, adult church isn’t quite like a Youth Group.

One of the ways we seek to avoid falling into this trap is to integrate youth into the life of the congregation as much as possible, teaching them how to be the church. Such activities as Youth-Led worship, more intentional time with parents and other adults doing church-like stuff, participating more fully in the ministries of the congregation, and providing leadership in the administration of the group itself, are all steps toward moving youth to Mickey’s face instead of relegating them to Mickey’s ear.

By teaching youth what it is to be the Church, we are equipping them for its current and future leadership. We don’t want to do away with the “feel” of the Youth Group atmosphere, because that is one of the marvelous gifts of being a teenager. But we do want to make sure that they know what “regular” church is like, and to make them a part of it.

Ok, so that’s our *Vision*. How do we get there?
OUR MISSION, OT VERSION:

“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

_Micah 6:6-8_
PROPHETIC YOUTH MINISTRY

Standing in the tradition of the great prophets Amos and Isaiah, Micah provided “…arguably the most…radical and detailed critique of contemporary society.” He lived in the countryside southwest of Jerusalem in the 8th century BCE, and called the people to task. They had strayed from the path they knew God desired them to travel, rejecting their covenantal obligations to care for the widow, the orphan, the poor, and the stranger.

Prophets were those who called the people to repentance, to turn and reposition themselves as God’s people, as God’s hands and feet in the world. Perhaps none expressed himself as succinctly as Micah, and scholar Lawrence Boadt comments on the above passage:

Micah 6:8 has long been recognized as an important statement of what the covenant should be: to do right, love goodness, and walk humbly before God. The rabbis who commented on this verse in the early centuries of the Christian era called it a one-line summary of the whole Law.

Remember what Jesus told his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17). Micah 6:8, then, seems an ideal programmatic text around which to build a Youth Ministry.

The very foundations of the Methodist movement, begun by John Wesley, were built around social action and reform. To quote from The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church (2000): “For Wesley there is no religion but social religion, no holiness but social holiness. The communal forms of faith in the Wesleyan tradition not only promote personal growth; they also equip and mobilize us for mission and service to the world.” We strive for personal spiritual growth developed hand-in-hand with a theology emphasizing outreach to the world. It is who we are as Christians and as United Methodists.

Everything we do in Arapaho UMYF should fulfill one or more of Micah’s admonishments – to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God. In 1743, Wesley articulated these principles in his Nature, Design, and Rules of the United Societies as follows: “First: By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind…Secondly: By… doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all…Thirdly: By attending upon all the ordinances of God.” We will refer to these as Acts of Justice, Acts of Kindness, and Acts of Formation.

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8 Book of Discipline, 48.
Acts of Justice

It is instructive that Micah spoke of justice first in his list. Acts of kindness without corresponding acts of justice can many times ring hollow. If we build houses for the poor in Juarez while ignoring the causes of their poverty, we may be doing little more than making ourselves feel better about being in a position of tremendous privilege in God’s creation.

Many people are aware of the work of Elie Wiesel, an author, activist, and Jewish survivor of the Holocaust. In his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize, Wiesel offered the audience these words:

No one is as capable of gratitude as one who has emerged from the kingdom of night.

We know that every moment is a moment of grace, every hour an offering; not to share them would mean to betray them. Our lives no longer belong to us alone; they belong to those who need us desperately.

…And that is why I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.9

Christians are called to just such passion for the “other,” whoever they may be. Our incarnational theology teaches us that by standing up for the “other” we are standing up for God and God’s will for the world.

In Arapaho UMYF, we study issues of justice and explore what our response to them should be as Christians and United Methodists. Youth research and present issues such as the modern slave trade, the root causes of poverty, addiction, etc. This is in keeping with “Our historic opposition to evils such as smuggling, inhumane prison conditions, slavery, drunkenness, and child labor,” which was “founded upon a vivid sense of God’s wrath against human injustice and wastage.”10

Sadly, many of the issues that prompted the beginnings of the Methodist movement in the 18th century are still problems in the world today. Our goal is not (necessarily) to make activists of youth. It is rather to allow the space to study the problems of the world and to discern what should be our proper response as Christians and United Methodists.

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10 Book of Discipline, 49.
Acts of Kindness

There is a Sufi story that could appear in the writings of any of our prophets:

Past the seeker, as he prayed, came the crippled and the beggar and the beaten. And seeing them, the holy one went down into deep prayer and cried, “Great God, how is it that a loving creator can see such things and yet do nothing about them?” And out of the long silence, God said: “I did do something about them. I made you.”

Acts of Justice seek to remedy the causes of the pain and brokenness in the world. Acts of Kindness seek to soothe that pain and to heal the brokenness where possible, reaching out in love to those in need to bring comfort, hope, and the message of God’s love.

These are the types of things that Jesus talks about in Matthew 25:31-46, things like feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, welcoming the stranger, visiting the sick and imprisoned. Jesus promised us (or warned us, as the case may be) that when we do these things (or don’t do them), we are caring for (or again, not caring for) him.

These are the things that Jesus talks about in Luke 10:25-37, the parable of the Good Samaritan. You know the story – a man is beaten and robbed, left for dead by the side of the road. A priest and a Levite both pass him without stopping, but the Samaritan goes out of his way to help, bandaging his wounds, taking him to an inn where it is safe, and paying the innkeeper to look after him while he heals. Jesus asks which of the three was a neighbor to the man, and is greeted with the obvious answer – the Samaritan. Jesus then closes the parable with the punch line – “Go and do likewise.”

In Arapaho UMYF, we take that command seriously. We are doing likewise when we go on Mission Trip. We are doing likewise when we participate in all those fundraisers to support that trip. We are doing likewise when we do local service work, such as serving food at the Salvation Army, painting a hallway in the church, taking turkeys to shut-ins at Thanksgiving, selling pumpkins at Arapaho’s Pumpkin Patch. And we have it on good authority that that’s what we’re supposed to be doing!

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11 The Spirituality of Imperfection, 81.
Acts of Formation

Spiritual formation is that process by which we deepen our relationship with God and Jesus Christ. Wesley called this process “attending upon all the ordinances of God,” and listed as examples several of the disciplines practiced by Christians for the past twenty centuries: participating in public worship; partaking in the Lord’s Supper; family and private prayer; Bible study; fasting; etc.

In Arapaho UMYF, we study these spiritual disciplines in an intentional way, reaching back to our rich faith heritage to connect with ways of nurturing our spiritual journeys. This process is as old as Christianity itself. Indeed, early Christianity was known as “the Way,” an image that vividly depicts what spiritual formation is all about.

The First Letter to Timothy gives us insight into spiritual formation in the early church, written as it is to a young man who becomes a leader of that church:

Train yourself in godliness, for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come…For to this end we toil and struggle, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe…Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity…Do not neglect the gift that is in you…Put these things into practice, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers. (1 Timothy 4:7b-8, 10, 12, 14a, 15-16)

We believe that not only are youth capable of developing a deep spirituality over the course of their time in UMYF, but that by doing so they become better leaders in the church for both today and the future. Studying and practicing the spiritual disciplines allows them to develop and nurture the gifts that God has given each of them, and deepens their relationship with their Creator.

Martin Buber tells a story of an early Hasidic Master who had a keen insight on spirituality:

Rabbi Zusya said “In the coming world, they will not ask me: ‘Why were you not Moses?’ They will ask me: ‘Why were you not Zusya?’”

Walking humbly with our God means developing a personal spirituality, learning how to be in relationship with God, and growing into the people God calls us to be.

12 The Spirituality of Imperfection, 2.
OUR MISSION, NT VERSION:

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:1-11
PROPHETIC CHRISTIAN YOUTH MINISTRY

Paul’s Letter to the Philippians is a letter full of hope, encouragement, grace, and truth. It is to the church at Philippi, a church that understands what it is to be truly Christian, that Paul writes some of the most sublime and meaningful admonitions of a pastor to his flock.

He urges them to “live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (1:27). He says that he has “…learned to be content with whatever I have…I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (4:11b, 13). He asks them to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” and here’s the kicker “for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (2:12b-13). Beautiful stuff.

But it is the opening verses of the second chapter, containing the famous “Christ Hymn” (which almost certainly predates Paul), that is programmatic for Arapaho UMYF. Paul is talking about what the very word Christian means – modeling our lives, to the extent that we are able, after the life of Jesus Christ. Paul is talking about living a life of service, a life of humility, a life filled with love and compassion and sympathy.

Acts of Justice, Acts of Kindness, and Acts of Formation all serve the same function; namely, guiding us on the path of discipleship. They are the means by which we accomplish the end – “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” Paul follows this admonition by quoting the Christ Hymn, an ancient and theologically rich summary of the mystery of our faith – Christ’s ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection.

Arapaho’s Youth Ministry, like the broader church, seeks to point beyond itself, seeks to point to Christ.

If our Vision Statement (Arapaho UMYF is a fellowship of youth, parents, and adult leaders seeking to grow spiritually while learning how to be the church of Jesus Christ) answers the question “Where are we going?,” our Mission Statement answers “How do we get there?” Attempting to re-interpret Micah and Paul for our context in the 21st century, we might put it this way: Arapaho UMYF seeks to nurture Christian discipleship in youth, parents, and adult leaders through acts of justice, acts of kindness, and acts of formation.

So there you have the theology of Youth Ministry here at Arapaho UMC – we know where we’re trying to go, and we know how we plan to get there!
Part II – Who Does What, and When?

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

There are four different groups of people we’ll be discussing in this section, outlining what everyone’s roles and responsibilities are – youth, parents, counselors, and the Youth Director. All are essential to this ministry, and the clearer we all are on where we’re coming from, the better! But first, let’s talk about some characteristics of this generation of youth.

Meet the Millennials!
The Millennials are that generation beginning with the high school graduating class of 2000, born in 1982 and ending roughly twenty years later. So defined, they will be the focus of youth ministry through the year 2020. As a result of their particular location in history, these young people possess tremendous potential. Their education levels, self-expectations, general emphasis on teamwork, and access to information and technology make this a cohort with a unique opportunity to impact change as we stand at the beginning of a new millennium.

Indeed, researchers Neil Howe and William Strauss assert that the Millennials have the potential to become one of America’s greatest generations. This is due, in no small part, to the emphasis that their parents and society in general have placed on their well-being: From conception to graduation, this 1982 cohort has marked a watershed in adult attitudes toward, treatment of, and expectations for children…Not since the Progressive era, near the dawn of the twentieth century, has America greeted the arrival of a new generation with such a dramatic rise in adult attention to the needs of children.¹³

They are growing up in an era of declining rates of divorce, abortion, violent crime, alcohol consumption, and drug abuse.¹⁴ Their parents, who are more and more likely to come from Generation X (as opposed to the Baby Boomers), perhaps in reaction to their own upbringing as “latchkey kids,” have placed a premium on spending time with their own children: “According to Time magazine, ‘Gen Xer’ has come to mean ‘Gen Nester,’ as young parents invent new expedients (home schooling, telecommuting, trading extra pay for extra time, moving close to parents) to separate their children from whatever seems threatening and unreliable.”¹⁵ Further, this is a group of young people that is intellectually challenged from their very early years, beginning with testing at all educational levels. All of these factors contribute to their “generational persona.”

¹⁴ Ibid.
¹⁵ Ibid., 56.
Howe and Strauss define generational persona as “…a distinctly human, and variable, creation embodying attitudes about family life, gender roles, institutions, politics, religion, culture, lifestyle, and the future.” Among the many traits noted as hallmarks of the Millennials, the following are particularly relevant to their relationship with the church: their parents’ generations have engendered a feeling in Millennials that they are, collectively, special, and “vital to the nation and to their parents’ sense of purpose;” they are confident, “with high levels of trust and optimism;” they are team-oriented, with “strong team instincts and tight peer bonds;” they are achieving, “on track to become the best-educated and best-behaved adults in the nation’s history;” finally, they are conventional, “more comfortable with their parents’ values than any other generation in living memory.” The historical setting of these kids, the generational persona that they exhibit, and the tremendous foundation for success that they have been provided all point to an opportunity for true greatness.

Particularly with regard to the conventionality of the Millennial generation, the National Study of Youth and Religion confirms the results of Howe and Strauss. The findings from that study are published in Christian Smith’s Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers.

Almost 80% of teens have beliefs that are somewhat or very similar to their parents’ beliefs. Further, 86% affirm belief in God, with just 2% claiming to not believe in God at all (13% were unsure). Over 80% affirm religion’s importance in “shaping daily life” and “shaping major life decisions,” with 50% or more in each category claiming that it is extremely or very important. Further, this generation is active in church, with 60% attending religious services 2-3 times per month or more. When they are in church, an astonishing 82% affirm that they usually feel that it is a “warm and welcoming place” for teens, and of those who attend a youth group, 84% profess to like it, 50% saying they like it very much.

In short, the contemporary church has the enviable advantage of being in ministry with young people who not only think that church is important, but who want to be there and enjoy it when they are present. Smith’s research undercuts much popular stereotyping about adolescents’ relationship with the church:

…the vast majority of American teenagers are exceedingly conventional in their religious identity and practices. Very few are restless, alienated, or rebellious; rather, the majority of U.S. teenagers seem basically content to follow the faith of

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16 Ibid., 40.
17 Ibid., 43-44. Clearly, I have a very optimistic view of this generation of young people, based both on the research cited here and my own experiences. For a critique of society’s sometimes hysterically pessimistic view of teenagers, see Barry Glassner, The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things (New York: Basic Books, 1999), especially chapter 3 – “Youth at Risk: Faulty Diagnoses and Callous Cures.”
their families with little questioning…The popular images of storm and stress, generation gap, and teen rebellion may describe the religious orientations and experiences of most teenagers of prior generations, but they do not accurately portray the religious realities of most teenagers in the United States today.\textsuperscript{19}

Despite the good news discovered by the National Study of Youth and Religion, a disquieting trend was also revealed. Large numbers of teens, despite their positive views on the importance of religion and willingness to embrace faith as a central aspect of their lives, “…are remarkably inarticulate and befuddled about religion. Interviewing teens, one finds little evidence that the agents of religious socialization in this country are being highly effective and successful with the majority of their young people.”\textsuperscript{20} Prophetic Christian youth ministry seeks to address this trend by emphasizing historical Christian spiritual disciplines and focusing on catechesis of young people.

Smith reports that the frequency of the practice of traditional spiritual disciplines by young people is low. Over the course of the previous year, 10\% of those surveyed practiced meditation, 25\% fasted, 31\% participated in a Bible study or small prayer group, 28\% read a devotional book other than the Bible, and only 32\% prayed once a day or more. While 64\% participated in youth groups in churches that have them, only 25\% attended religious education classes such as Sunday School weekly (or more often), and almost half attended Sunday School once per month or less frequently. At home, the subject of God or religion is discussed only a few times per year or never by 39\% of youth and only 35\% pray with their families other than at mealtimes or during religious services. These results indicate that the majority of youth are not practicing the faith in ways that lead to formation as disciples.

This shaky spiritual formation showed up in the interviews conducted by the study. The research led Smith to a troubling conclusion: “…a significant part of Christianity in the United States is actually only tenuously Christian in any sense that is seriously connected to the actual historical Christian tradition.”\textsuperscript{21} In other words, the church seems to be doing an inadequate job of teaching young people the faith. As a result, Smith makes the pointed recommendation that “religious educators need to work much harder on articulation. We were astounded by the realization that for very many teens we interviewed, it seemed as if our interview was the first time any adult had ever asked them what they believed.”\textsuperscript{22}

Prophetic Christian youth ministry equips young people to answer Jesus’ question – “who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15 and parallels) – both by focusing on teaching the content of the Christian faith, its doctrines and creeds, and by engaging youth in the historical Christian spiritual disciplines. In this dual process of catechesis and spiritual disciplines

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 120. Smith’s emphasis.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 171.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 267. Smith’s emphasis.
formation, youth discern who they are as Christian disciples, figuring out the shape and nuance of what God has in store for them. By setting aside sacred time to study the scriptures, pray and meditate in public and private, fast, journal, etc., young people are encouraged to explore their faith, to wrestle with the issues and challenges it presents, and to appropriate it for themselves.

This is youth ministry beyond the goals of simple maintenance (i.e., keeping young people coming to church), fellowship (i.e., engendering a positive group spirit that strives to make people happy above all else), and protection (i.e., keeping them safe from society’s various ills) criticized by David Ng. While maintenance, fellowship, and protection may be worthy by-products of a healthy youth ministry, they are misguided as the primary goals. Smith notes that, while many teens are uncomfortable talking about Jesus, “the same teens could be remarkably articulate about other subjects about which they had been drilled, such as drinking, drugs, STDs, and safe sex.” Clearly, the protection model seems to be alive and well. By contrast, prophetic Christian youth ministry takes seriously its role in, and ultimate goal of, nurturing the identity formation of adolescents as Christian disciples.

Now that we know a bit about the kids, it’s time to talk about the two broad and four specific roles in this ministry – the families (youth and parents), and adult leaders (counselors and Youth Director).

Families
Transformative Youth Ministry includes both youth and their parents. The roles of both groups must meet the need of giving youth space to begin and continue their self-identification, pulling away to find their own path in life, while honoring the reality that they will ultimately learn their faith from their parents. The trick is to find the right balance.

Youth
Ok, this should be pretty obvious. But since this is Youth Ministry, we couldn’t leave the kids off this list. Here’s what we expect of youth:

• An openness and willingness to grow spiritually and learn how to be the church.
• Participation in the development of and adherence to our group covenant of conduct.
• The United Methodist thing – support of the group through their prayers, their presence, their gifts, their service, and their witness.

That’s it. Pretty straightforward. Very doable.

23 David Ng, Youth in the Community of Disciples (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1984), 15
24 Smith, 267.
Parents
At Arapaho, parents are much, much more than chauffeurs and cooks. Don’t misunderstand, we will definitely need your culinary and driving skills many, many times along our journey together! But that’s not the most important thing. Not by a long shot.

To quote from The Godbearing Life: “Research overwhelmingly identifies the family as the most important faith field in a young person’s life…congregational influence pales beside the influence of families on developing faith.”25 It is our belief that parents play an essential role in Youth Ministry here at Arapaho.

Adolescence is a time when young people begin to separate from their families and to discern and form their own identity. This can be a painful and, at times, heartbreaking process for parents as their children sometimes clumsily and not-so-subtly pull away to find their way. But don’t let them fool you – your youth will ultimately learn their faith from you.

Arapaho UMYF seeks to meet both needs, by providing the space adolescents need as they find their voice while providing sacred space with parents so that they can nurture the roots of a faith that will sustain them.

We seek to balance these two needs by asking the following of you:

• Participate when you can in our Fifth Sunday programs (discussed in “The Things We Do” below) and other events specifically designed for youth and parents together such as, the New Youth-Parent retreat for entering 7th graders.
• Join us in our fundraising activities, working side by side with your children in service work. They will follow your example.
• Give your moral support and gratitude to the counselors who give so much of themselves in service to youth.
• Let the Youth Director know of any issues that may be affecting your child. The more we know what’s going on in the lives of our youth, the better able we will be to meet their needs.
• Give the Youth Director candid feedback about what you think is going well and what you may have concerns about. This is truly a partnership, and dialogue is always desired and welcomed.
• Then, of course, there’s the part about culinary skills, hospitality, and driving!

Adult Leaders

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. John 1:35-37

The view of Dean and Foster on the role of adult leaders in Youth Ministry is compelling. They are speaking of youth ministers specifically, but I think this equally applies to counselors:

As Robin Maas has pointed out, youth ministers are John the Baptists, people who point to Jesus Christ (and who are often thought strange for doing so)…Karl Barth preferred the term witness to describe the kind of ministry we are suggesting, reserving the term incarnation for God alone. Barth’s point is well taken, especially in light of many popular youth ministry texts that imply that incarnational ministry calls adults to “model” Jesus Christ for young people, something well beyond our sinful capabilities even on our best days…The point of incarnational ministry is not to model Christ so youth will follow us but – to use Martin Luther’s language – to become “Christs” for our neighbor, incarnating Christ’s love transparently so that youth will follow him.\textsuperscript{26}

That is the role of adult leaders in Youth Ministry at Arapaho. The rest is just details.

Counselors

Counselors are very special people with very specific skill sets, a group of volunteers who literally give weeks of their time each year in loving service to the youth of Arapaho. They are the mentors and healthy adult models that our youth look to for guidance. As such, they have an awesome responsibility and tremendous honor. Consequently, there are also high expectations of them.

Counselors are not typically parents, for two reasons. First, youth need space for their own faith and identity formation. Second, they need adult role models in their lives other than their parents.

These are the traits that are essential to counselors, the ideal toward which all adult leaders (including the Youth Director) strive:

• A call to work with youth (a belief that it is God’s will that they work with youth).
• They have to love teenagers as unconditionally as a human being can – with all the attendant energy and late nights, emotional highs and lows, drama and grumpiness, unbridled enthusiasm and equally unbridled surliness, at times seemingly nonstop hormone roller coaster.
• They absolutely, positively cannot make decisions based on being liked by the kids.
• They have to be patient.
• They have to be flexible. Extremely flexible. We’re talking yoga-like flexibility here.
• Did I mention they have to love teenagers?

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 27-28.
• They have to be open minded, and willing to let the kids do their intellectual and faith exploration without trying to convince them otherwise.
• They have to let kids be kids, and not take away their feelings or opinions.
• Did I mention the patience and flexibility?
• They have to be trustworthy.
• They have to have strong boundaries and the confidence to enforce them.
• They have to pass a background check and be a moral and ethical example to the kids they’re shepherding.
• They cannot be afraid to be the adults in their relationships with the kids, meaning that they have to make decisions even when the kids don’t like them (and unfortunately, there are plenty of those types of decisions).
• They have to model the behavior we expect of the youth.
• They have to defer the important decisions to the Youth Director’s discretion.
• They really have to love teenagers, with patience and flexibility.

Here are the time commitments required of counselors:

• Ideally, a counselor is present for at least half of the group’s activities, including Sunday programs, fundraising activities, and retreats. Building relationships with teenagers is a process, and presence is essential to that process.
• Attend counselor meetings.
• A willingness to go on Mission Trips each year. Not every counselor may be able to attend every Mission Trip, but that is the goal.
• Added all up, that’s conservatively 10 hours per month, not counting trips.

Here are the rewards of being a counselor:
• The undying gratitude of the Youth Director and the parents.
• The occasional gratitude of the kids.
• The (albeit messy and oftentimes unarticulated) love of the kids.
• The camaraderie, fellowship, and love of a group of adult youth workers.
• The absolute certainty that God sees, approves of, and is grateful for their work with youth.

Youth Director
The primary role of the Youth Director is to articulate the answers to the questions “Where? What? When? How? And Who?” then stay out of the way while God does God’s thing. Beyond that, the Youth Director organizes and manages the administrative details of UMYF, keeping youth, parents, and counselors informed of and focused on what they all agree are the important things.
Background Checks
There is one final note that needs to be made, and it is an important one. Absolutely nothing is more important than the safety of our youth, and to that end, every adult who will be in a position of working with youth must have a background check completed before that work begins. That obviously includes Counselors and the Youth Director. But it also includes parents who go on trips – camping, retreats, or Mission Trip. See the Youth Director for details.

THE THINGS WE DO

There are four main components around which UMYF is built here at Arapaho: Sunday’s UMYF program; Wednesday’s Synago; service work; and trips. This section details specifics of those activities.

Sunday UMYF
This is the heart and soul of our group. Each week, youth meet to grow together in their faith. Sunday programming has four main features: a “meet and greet/hang out/enjoy each other’s company in a non-planned way” time; a meal provided by parents; programming led by youth and guided by the Youth Director; and a closing devotional.

Programming is built around the programmatic passages discussed above. Roughly speaking, the UMYF program calendar is built around Acts of Justice, Acts of Kindness, and Acts of Formation. That accounts for three Sundays per month. The other Sunday will usually be some sort of team building activity, with an occasional game night, or pool party, or bowling trip thrown in for good measure!

Fifth Sundays, occurring four times per year, will be dedicated to activities that involve youth and parents together. Other opportunities will be provided throughout the year for youth and parents to enjoy each other’s company and share their faith journey.

Summer programming tends to be much lighter and more focused on fellowship and fun activities such as trips to Six Flags, outings to professional baseball games, picnics, pool parties, etc.

There is no Sunday UMYF on most major holidays such as Memorial Day, Labor Day, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. July 4th is determined on a programmatic basis.
**Synago**
This program meets from 6:30 – 8:00 pm on Wednesday evenings, September through May. The program is open to youth in Senior High (10th-12th grades). Synago, is Greek for “come together”, and is a student-led small group. The purpose of Synago groups are to; grow in our relationship with God through Jesus Christ; grow closer to one another; and to create space for sharing in an atmosphere of confidence, trust and open-mindedness. We support each other in Christian love and invite others to join us on our journey. Synago meets in the home of one of the students or at the church.

These Wednesday night gatherings provide youth a safe place to ask the tough questions that inevitably arise during their faith journeys. While Synago curriculum guides us, the conversation flows where the Spirit moves it. There are no inappropriate questions during the meeting, and youth are encouraged to think deeply and searchingly about their faith and relationship with God.

It is our belief that a faith that can withstand the skepticism of the world and the inevitable doubts which, arise throughout one’s life, must be a faith that has been thoroughly explored, tested, questioned, and found to be life-giving. While all interaction with youth is rooted in this principle, Synago groups create intentional space for that exploration.

The ancient Israelites knew the importance of wrestling with our faith:

Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob’s hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, “Let me go, for the day is breaking.” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go, unless you bless me.” So he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” Then the man said, “You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.”…And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.” The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. (Genesis 32:24-31)

The very name Israel means “He Who Wrestles With God,” and this story is a wonderful allegory of what Paul calls “working out” our salvation: “…work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12b-13). What these texts seem to say is that it is ok to question, to test, to explore, to wrestle with our faith, our salvation. Indeed, it’s
what God wants of us. And what enables such “working out” is that God is at work in us and through us.

Hand-me-down faith is rarely viable or vital, except for those who have attempted to hand it down. For faith to be truly life-giving and strong, it must be appropriated anew by each generation. We trust that God is at work in our youth, and that their faith can survive such rigors. Thus, the church stays strong and relevant, and kids are less likely to wander when they leave the nest.

Service Work
Service work takes many forms, including having a dedicated spot in the Sunday UMYF rotation and being the key component of annual Mission Trips. But it is much more than that. It is fundamental to Christ’s gospel.

The Christ Hymn from Philippians and the verses with which Paul introduces it point to the essential “other-focused” nature of Christ’s message. The entire Gospel of Luke revolves around Christ’s commitment to a life of compassion:

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”
And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:16-21)

Some acts of service are obvious – when we serve at the Salvation Army, deliver Thanksgiving turkeys to shut-ins, or build a house for the poor, we are acting as God’s hands and feet in the world. Some acts of service are more subtle, though every bit as important. Every time we wash a car, make a Super Bowl sub, or spend hours cooking, packing and selling BBQ, we are enabling ourselves to do the more obvious work of reaching out to others. And by doing so, we are learning how to be the church in the world.

**Trips**

There are several different types of trips we take in UMYF, all of which have different purposes.

- **Mission Trip** – this is the big one. Each year, the group takes a week-long trip as an act of love and service to those less fortunate. Most fundraising throughout the year supports this trip. The congregation is an important part of this process, particularly through the Sponsors program and subsequent Sponsors Dinner.

  The purpose of Mission Trip is three-fold. First, the kids learn how to be the church through a dramatic act of kindness. This is what Jesus is talking about in Matthew 25:

  > When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory…Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me’…Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me. (Matthew 25:31, 34-36, 40b)

  Second, Mission Trip is a cultural learning experience, as our kids see a side of life they may not otherwise be exposed to. Past Mission Trip destinations have included Juarez, Mexico, Appalachia, and Birmingham, Alabama. Third, we know of no more effective team building than the physical and emotional challenge of Mission Trip.

- **Retreats** – these are typically focused around a theme, are thoroughly programmed, and concentrate on spiritual growth. In special cases, they are designed for both youth and parents. Much as Jesus escaped to the wilderness at the start of his ministry, so, too, we remove ourselves from the world to focus on our spiritual
condition. It is preferred that youth and adults who are going on Mission Trip attend the Spring Retreat. Past destinations have included New Mexico and Bridgeport.

- **Camping** – these trips are much more low-key, and just give youth an opportunity to hang out together. Very little is programmed on these short excursions, outside of an evening devotional.

Those are the interesting things we do to get us where we want to be!
Part III – The Administrative Works

Now that we’ve answered the big five questions (where, how, when, what, who), there are a few administrative details to cover.

YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Ideally, the leadership of the Youth Group at Arapaho involves the significant participation of the youth themselves, especially as they grow and mature in the program. Youth help develop and facilitate Sunday programs, help plan Mission Trip and the required fundraisers, nurture each other’s spiritual growth, and provide input on the variety of decisions affecting events, youth space, calendar management, etc. In this way, youth learn both basic leadership skills that will serve them well in all aspects of their lives, and more importantly they learn how to be the church.

There are no elected positions within the current structure. The youth lead as a group through Youth Service Team meetings. During the process of planning the calendar and selecting programming, youth leadership is developed and exercised. Membership on the YST is voluntary and any youth or Counselor is invited to participate.

• Youth Service Team – the YST meets once a quarter from September through May, and is the group that sets the broad agenda for UMYF at Arapaho. There two primary duties of the YST: (1) assisting the Youth Director in setting the agenda for UMYF programs; and (2) assisting the Youth Director in planning special events such as trips, lock-ins, parties, etc. In specific cases, subcommittees may be formed to manage specific events, such as Mission Trip or the Christmas Party.

Another way in which youth provide leadership to the group is through facilitating Sunday programming. Indeed, each member of the Youth Group at Arapaho is encouraged to lead at least one program over the course of a year. (Note that more than one youth can lead programs.) In all cases, the programming will be prepared and rehearsed ahead of time with either the Youth Director or a Youth Counselor.

The benefits of leading programming are three-fold. First, youth feel an enhanced sense of ownership in the group. This gives them an appreciation for the challenges of preparing programming and encourages them to listen attentively to other people’s programs. Second, youth are able to delve deeply into whatever theological issues are being addressed by that week’s program. Third, youth learn the importance and discipline of preparation.

All of these ways in which youth participate in the leadership of the group serve our dual goals of deepening their spirituality and teaching them how to be the church.
COMMUNICATION

One of the big challenges with the busy lives of parents and youth is keeping everyone in the loop on UMYF events and programs. Here are the ways we attempt to keep you informed:

• **Parent Meetings** – these meetings are held quarterly or as needed. They are scheduled for the hour before UMYF, and the Youth Room will be available for the kids to hang out, play games, etc., while the parents are meeting.

• **Church Newspaper** – this is a bi-weekly publication. We will post articles regarding youth events and activities on a regular basis.

• **Weekly emails** – every Tuesday these go out with details of that week’s events, plus any other information necessary.

• **Website/Web calendar** – check the AUMC website for periodic updates to the Youth page. All youth events are posted on the web calendar.

• **Office Hours** – the Youth Director’s current office hours are Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays. You may contact the Youth Director via phone, email, and appointment. Phone number: 972-231-1005, x16. Email address: marcia@arapaho-umc.com or marciaketner@yahoo.com
IN CONCLUSION…

As we come to the end, we should return to a story mentioned above, a story told by Martin Buber that reveals a keen insight on spirituality:

*Rabbi Zusya said,*

“In the coming world, they will not ask me: ‘Why were you not Moses?’

They will ask me: ‘Why were you not Zusya?’”

Prophetic Christian youth ministry affirms this insight and contextualizes it, affirming that each young person is being called by God to something, and that our job in youth ministry is to help them discern what that calling is. By giving them the tools to critically reflect upon and critique their culture, by encouraging and empowering them to *do* justice in whatever form they are called to do, by steeping them in the religious practices and teachings of the Christian tradition, and above all by walking beside them as they seek to fulfill the two greatest commandments, prophetic Christian youth ministry is just like ministry with any other Christian.

As talented and capable as the Millennial generation is, and as much promise as they show for transforming the world into a place more like that which God intends it to be, these young people are, of course, not God. Nor are they intended to be, echoing the insight of Rabbi Zusya from long ago. Thus, prophetic Christian youth ministry does not ask, “What would Jesus do?” After all, in the coming world, youth will not be asked why they were not Jesus Christ. Rather, prophetic Christian youth ministry asks young people, “Who is God in Jesus Christ calling you to be?” To be in a position to ask that question, and to help young people work out the answer, is a great gift and a high calling indeed.

So there you have it – a handbook for UMYF here at Arapaho United Methodist Church. We hope the information presented here has been helpful. We hope even more that it has been exciting, and that you will consider becoming part of this ministry. As we close, let us consider this reading from a book called *The Prophet*, by philosopher Kahlil Gibran:

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And a woman who held a babe against her bosom said,
Speak to us of children.
And he said:

Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life’s longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you, yet they belong not to you.
You may give them your love but not your thoughts.
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
for their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.
You are the bows from which your children
as living arrows are sent forth.
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,
and He bends you with His might
that His arrows may go swift and far.
Let your bending in the archer’s hand be for gladness;
For even as he loves the arrow that flies,
so He loves the bow that is stable.

May the Archer bless us and keep us all. Amen.
Arapaho UMYF Benediction

May the Lord bless you and keep you.
May the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you.
May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.
Amen.

Numbers 6:24-26