

Introduction to the Investing in Our Youth Strategic Initiative

At First Presbyterian Church of Libertyville, we place significant value on our youth (grades 6 -12) and their participation in the life of our church. During their years as students, we get to see their formation from children of the church to members of our congregation, and watch their spiritual journey unfold as their life in Christ develops and grows. We believe that continued care and focus is needed to ensure that these students have all the resources they need across this six-year period of time, and this report contains our thoughts, observations and recommended actions to meet this objective.

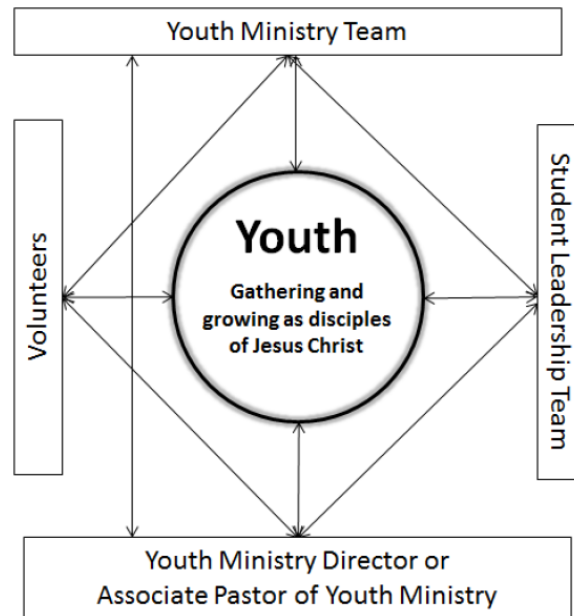
The Investing in our Youth Innovation Team looked at 5 different facets surrounding our youth ministry, with a goal aligned to each facet. Because these are facets of our youth ministry, many of the activities that are needed to support the goal overlap each other in an affirmative way. We see these goals as being part of the overall plan that will reinforce the work that has been started and ensure the vitality of our ministries to our youth for years to come.

Between the time that Youth were specifically called out as an area of focus by our congregation and the completion of this report, we have called Rev. Kara Smith-Laubenstein as our full-time Associate Pastor of Youth Ministries. Having a now full-time APYM doesn't diminish the work of this Innovation Team, but instead has provided us with better insight into the health of our student ministries, our leaders and volunteers, and how our youth are engaged in so many ways. Rev. Smith-Laubenstein has been an active member of the Youth Innovation Team and the development of this report, and many of the ideas and plans she has already started are incorporated in our recommended actions.

Structure

Structure for our youth leadership and volunteers is a critical component to a well-defined and well-executed program. Our belief is that this structure was well articulated by the Youth Staffing Design Team but not fully implemented. Missing is the “depth” of the description of what each leader is supposed to do and how to act. Structure also needs to address unclear communication with those directly involved or impacted outside of Youth structure, and account for youth involvement and leadership which takes place across many groups within our church that are not considered in the scope of youth.

Our current youth program teams, namely the Youth Ministry Team (YMT) and the Associate Pastor for Youth Ministries (APYM), have been gifted with a fantastic structure that was carefully considered by the Youth Staffing Design Team (YSDT) to serve as the blueprint for a youth-centric structure for First Pres. Our Innovation Team did not see cause to change the format of this structure (with the exception of a minor distinction between Leaders and Volunteers in the Volunteer box) so our focus on structure at this time is around evolving how these interrelated groups function on an ongoing basis.



Youth Ministry Team (YMT)

In the current state, the Youth Ministry Team functions as both Steering Committee, a source for regular Volunteers and Leaders, and often the implementers of whatever needs to be done. This group should become more strategic in their focus on reaching youth across the entire Church body, towards planning and away from doing the work of Volunteers. Our recommendation is that the YMT consider the health and vitality of all youth activities – not just CE focused (Confirmation, SHF/JHF, Sunday School), but include other areas that have vibrant youth participation (music, Food Pantry, Boy Scouts). YMT should continue to remain as a committed under CE, but should consider how it also meets the needs of youth outside of CE-sponsored activities. Further, we recommend that YMT designate individual members to act as liaison to these other areas to consider needs as part of the overall youth strategy. Finally, we

recommend a formalization of the YMT role, turning it into a 2-year commitment with members staggered to ensure continuity and longevity of the vision.

Student Leadership Team (SLT)

This group is an exciting prospect for our APYM to position students who want to really use their voices and abilities to provide leadership to their peers and assist with programming activities. Since this group is just starting to form, the Innovation Team recognizes the need for heavy APYM involvement to get it started, but trusts that under the guidance of the YMT and with structure around qualification and training as established by the YSDT, this group will be successful in developing engaged student leaders. A final recommendation is to have a member of the SLT be the student liaison to the YMT.

Associate Pastor Youth Ministries (APYM)

We are very excited with Kara Smith-Laubenstein's full time status in the APYM position and to have her included in the Youth Innovation Team to develop these recommendations. One key area of concern will be to find volunteers and leaders to carry out some of the more administrative parts of her current responsibilities (such as acting as "Cruise Director" for planning Mission Trips) so that she can focus on her core job responsibilities as outlined by Session. We recommend that the APYM should work together with groups who have responsibility for youth programs to work together a common vision of Youth Ministry aligned to the 3-year Church-wide vision, and to ensure calendars are synchronized as much as possible to eliminate conflicts between programs.

Volunteers

There are really two distinct groups within this structure – Leaders and Volunteers. Since the level of involvement is very different, this distinction is important with any recommended changes.

- Leaders should be required to commit to faithful and regular attendance at their specified activity. They receive some level of training which equips them to lead youth in their specific activity. A formal process should exist for individuals to become Leaders – it isn't a matter of self-identification and selection, but through a process that involves the YMT and APYM. Leaders should be empowered to lead their activities but also be accountable to YMT and Youth Ministry Director
- Volunteers shouldn't require specific training beyond require Youth Protection training. They need to be available to take on specific tasks (like picking up a cake, cleaning up after a reception, or providing transportation for a youth event) in support of different groups in the Structure and activities in the life of Youth ministry. A pool of volunteers should be developed that can be tapped to complete tasks for events.

Goal #1 – Structure

To fully implement the structure identified by the Youth Staffing Design Team by May, 2017, so that the ministries of First Pres Libertyville which touch the lives of our Youth are planned and executed by a full complement of able-bodied leaders and volunteers.

What must you accomplish?	By whom?	By when?	With what?	How will you measure success?
Implement changes to the Youth Ministry Team to align themselves as a Steering Committee across all Youth activities.	APYM, YMT	By 9/30/16		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and implementation of a YMT statement of purpose. • Liaisons to each youth ministry identified.
Develop the SLT operating structure, recruit and train students for membership, and implement	APYM, in consultation with YMT	By 1/31/17		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and implementation of an SLT statement of purpose. • First class of students identified and trained on their purpose.
Develop 2016-17 Youth Ministry plan	APYM, YMT, other church program leaders	By 9/31/16		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of an integrated Youth Ministry Plan
Complete Leader roster to support 2016 Youth Ministry Plan	APYM, YMT, other church program leaders	By 9/31/16		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Leader needs are identified and met for 2016 • Specific training needs are identified
Develop Volunteer list to support 2016 Youth Ministry Plan	APYM, YMT, SLT	By 4/1/17		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A list of potential Volunteers is completed for all planned 2016-17 activities

Leadership

Without leadership within our youth ministries, within the structures setup to support our youth, and to ensure that the spiritual growth and well-being of each student is being considered, our programs can't succeed and a valued demographic within our church will not thrive. Appropriate leadership is critical for vibrant student ministry. The types of leaders and the skills they bring vary and with good reason; leadership on the Youth Ministry Team is not necessarily the same leadership required as a Sunday School teacher or Junior/Senior High Choir director.

Our church benefits from some amazing people who are in positions of leadership with our youth, who dedicate their time, energy and talent towards our student's lives. We could not have successful programs without them. Often though, we face the task of never having enough leaders, or leaders who have barely been recruited before they are asked to lead in ways they might not be equipped. Furthermore, we have expectations of our Associate Pastor of Youth Ministries (APYM) that as a "super leader," they will be the Pied Piper who draws in all the leadership necessary for our programs to thrive. With attention and action, we can ensure a full complement of leaders is available and prepared to lead our youth.

For purposes of this section, leadership applies to volunteer or part-time staff (primarily within the Music team) who have committed to a regular leadership role within a program such as Junior or Senior High Fellowship, Sunday School, Confirmation, or Youth Music activities. Volunteers (such as Mission Trip Advisors, Great Escape Chaperones or Confirmation Mentors) may require some further development but are not specifically included in the scope of this section. See Volunteers at the end.

Focus on youth leadership naturally falls into a few categories:

- Recruiting and preparing new Leaders
- Supporting existing Leaders
- Planning for new leadership opportunities

Recruiting and preparing for new Leaders

A few observations:

- Many current youth Leaders have been in their positions for 2+ years. Their involvement may have begun as their child entered the program and has persisted long after that child has graduated. Planning for their eventual replacement is not often considered with adequate lead-time.
- Programs like Sunday School and Music programs are almost entirely planned and led by the designated leaders, while JHF/SHF Advisors and Confirmation Small Group Leaders work with Staff members to support an existing curricula. This leads to differing levels of responsibility for the programs.
- Training offered by the church for adults working with youth focuses primarily on protection of youth. All Leaders have the opportunity to interact with youth and may find themselves in a conversation about faith, challenges outside of church or within their family that the Leader may lack training to do well.

Recruiting unpaid leaders can be a challenge. In some instances, High School students can be Leaders in the right situations but not for all activities. The SLT can be tapped to provide leadership to other students in the right situations, and as part of the maturity in their own faith they can act as mentors to others.

The model utilized with Confirmation Small Group Leaders was identified as particularly effective. These Leaders were invited to a design meeting with Rev. Dodds Ingersoll where they reviewed the plan for the year, discussed what worked well and what didn't, then formed the approach for the next year.

Supporting Existing Leaders

Confirmation has a 5th Small Group Leader who is not assigned a specific small group but can step in as needed when another leader cannot attend. Having more Leaders than necessarily required may be a luxury for some areas of Youth ministry but it can be extremely beneficial for continuity with absences and to prevent burnout.

Communication among all existing leaders varies, depending primarily on the level of autonomy. A greater emphasis on planning across all programs should be given, and communication throughout the year amongst leaders can be improved.

Before the time comes to replace a leader (hopefully because they have enjoyed a long tenure and are ready to move on to something new), responsibility should be placed on the outgoing leader to identify their replacement. This doesn't have to be their sole responsibility, but having knowledge of what it takes to be successful in the position makes the outgoing leader the ideal person to identify their successor.

Planning for new leadership opportunities

We can't predict the next new program area that might arise, so we recommend a process be developed that could be followed in the event that a new group is desired to be formed. Knowing that such a process exists may inspire students to think of many more ideas than can be implemented, so the process should have enough rigors to ensure that only ideas with high probability of success will be implemented.

Volunteers

Some volunteer activities like mission trips or retreats are complex to staff because of extensive time commitments and close proximity to youth 24/7. Male volunteers are specifically challenging to identify.

Goal #2 – Leadership

To ensure a robust set of Leaders are ready to support our current activities by May 2017, so that the ministries of First Pres Libertyville are fully staffed by a full complement of able-bodied and spirit-filled leaders and volunteers.

What must you accomplish?	By whom?	By when?	With what?	How will you measure success?
Develop the SLT operating structure, recruit and train students for membership, and implement (same as Structure)	APYM, in consultation with YMT	By 10/31/16		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and implementation of an SLT charter. • First class of students identified and trained on their purpose.
Complete Leader roster to support 2016 Youth Ministry Plan (same as Structure)	APYM, YMT, other church program leaders	By 9/31/16		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Leader needs are identified and met for 2016 • Specific training needs are identified
Develop Volunteer list to support 2016 Youth Ministry Plan (same as Structure)	APYM, YMT, SLT	By 4/1/17		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A list of potential Volunteers is completed for all planned 2016-17 activities
Develop a process for forming new activities	APYM, YMT	By 4/1/17		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of a new activity process

Parents

Though our programs are centered around the youth, parents are part of the glue that makes their involvement stick. Before students can drive themselves to church, it is the parents that bring them. Before students can pay their own way, it is the parents who foot the bill for activities and events. Without parental involvement, a teenager is less likely to thrive in our church's youth program. But parents aren't often drawn into involvement with the youth or the larger church, leading to many students beginning strong, especially at confirmation age, and then slowly losing touch.

In order to have a thriving set of youth programs, we need to focus our efforts with parents in three areas:

1. Education and strategies for success in getting youth engaged and keeping them engaged, and forming community with the parents of youth
2. Clear and comprehensive information about programs and activities
3. Transforming parents into volunteers

Forming a community of parents

Providing resources and strategies to parents on how to cope with their growing teenagers is one way to help bring parents into involvement. More importantly is creating the network of parents who can act as role models, who have brought their children into active participation in youth activities and who can share their experience and strategies with others. Face to face discussions with parents and amongst parents can go a long way towards providing that support, especially for parents of children entering 6th and 9th grades. Further consideration should be given to hosting parent events that coincide with Confirmation, JHF and SHF on a periodic basis.

Keeping church activities in mind

Parents are bombarded with paperwork from school and extracurricular activities, as well as church. Activities at First Pres are well advertised for our youth programs, but it is difficult to keep up with all the information and keep it prioritized. Utilization of technology is important in this case and should consider:

- A single page on the website with all the dates for Junior and Senior High activities with links to further information.
- When emails are sent out, send with a calendar attachment that can be opened directly into a parent or student's calendar.
- Continue utilization of text messaging to students and parents alike with key reminders, information and encouragement
- Leveraging digital communication within the church (such as TV monitors) in addition to print and other electronic formats.
- Using the Confirmation newsletter as a model, provide parents with an update on all that is happening and coming up that involves student life at First Pres.

Transforming Parents into Volunteers

Our activities and programs need additional volunteers over the level of participation that we have today. By defining clearly what is needed of each volunteer, making the process for signing up simple and easy to do when parents have time, we expect that we can engage a broader base of parent volunteers.

In addition to a calendar of programs, a “calendar of volunteers” should be created in parallel to identify the number and types of volunteers that are required to make each event successful. By defining out the role and extent of the commitment, these could then be posted to a tool like VolunteerSpot and shared out with parents so that they can find a time that best meets their interests and schedule. Many of our activities are planned 12+ months in advance, so this approach coupled with reminders and an easy calendar entry, may garner greater participation.

Additionally, recruiting parent volunteers to chair events like the Baccalaureate Sunday reception or Great Escape would be a great opportunity for someone outside of the APYM or YMT to take the lead in planning events that have a well-established setup and fairly well known volunteer needs.

Goal #3 – Parents

To increase involvement of parents in the many programs and activities at First Pres Libertyville by May 2017, so that our parents continue to fulfill their promise to their children at baptism.

What must you accomplish?	By whom?	By when?	With what?	How will you measure success?
Plan a series of events with parents to inform and build community throughout the year	APYM, APCF, YMT	By 9/30/16		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation of parents • Survey of feedback from parents
Develop and execute a communication plan for youth and parents based on the annual calendar	APYM, YMT, other church program leaders	By 9/30/16		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication plan developed and executed
Develop Volunteer list to support 2016 Youth Ministry Plan (same as Structure)	APYM, YMT, SLT	By 4/1/17		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A list of potential Volunteers is completed for all planned 2016-17 activities

Space

While it is true that the youth of the church can make themselves at home almost anywhere within our facilities and the youth lounge provides them with a space of their own for meeting, there is a general lack of signs within the church that point out how we value our students.

- Renovations to the Social Hall that incorporated hanging light fixtures and breakable television monitors, the only inside space where active games can be played is now limited.
- Recent loss of the field at Brainerd has confined our students even further to spaces that are smaller and less appropriate to their requirements.

Adaptions have taken place to the types of activities, but this also sends a message to our students that their needs often take a back seat to other priorities and groups. This leaves us with an opportunity to explore new spaces and seek changes to existing spaces to better suit the needs for our students to remain active, engaged and feel wanted.

Inside

Following recent renovations, the youth lounge is a much more usable space than it has been in recent years. As the dedicated space for youth activities within the church, the youth lounge continues to be the hub of student activity and a much appreciated refuge for their activities. Because it is located under the Chapel, very few adults outside of parents and volunteers see what goes on in this location. Increased signage could help lead students and adults to the youth lounge in a more welcoming way. Having a space on more centrally located walls or on a television display that highlight activities of the youth would be a great way to bring the youth activities to the rest of the church.

Though it sounds stereotypical, many of our youth (and young adults) show up to church with coffee in one hand and their phone in the other. Having a place just outside the youth lounge with high tables and stools with built in places to plug in a phone and enjoy would be a great way to have youth and adults alike congregate in an appropriate space outside of specific program times. We would like to see the former “stage” area as a place where this could happen. Additionally, having a Keurig-type machine available either in the Social Hall or Youth Lounge would be an additional convenience.

Outside

We should look to other areas of our property to identify a space that can be utilized for more active games, such as the underutilized playground space, the lot across the street from the CE wing or the visitor parking lot. Any of these spaces would provide opportunity for temporary installation of volleyball nets or more possibly a permanent basketball hoop.

We also recommend reaching out to District 128 officials to understand how we might make use of the Brainerd field on a more regular basis for games or an outdoor movie night.

Beyond our Church Property

With many nearby options such as Independence Grove, the Libertyville Sports Complex, and the Adler warming house, we should consider holding events outside of the church as opportunities for different

activities than can be accommodated in our facilities and as ways to reach out and involve others from within our community.

Goal #4 – Space

To increase access to our youth and better meet their needs for different spaces, we propose a joint plan with Buildings and Grounds be developed by March 2017, so that our spaces reflect the needs of our youth and can be planned in a way that is manageable within budget.

What must you accomplish?	By whom?	By when?	With what?	How will you measure success?
Identify potential needs/uses of existing space for youth activities	APYM, SLT, Children’s Ministry Team, CE Elder	8/31/16		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of potential space and areas of presence and visibility within and outside of the church
Meet with Buildings and Grounds to review possible uses of existing spaces for youth activities	APYM, SLT, Children’s Ministry Team, CE Elder	By 9/30/16		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of actionable outputs
Develop contact with District 128 regarding use of the Brainerd field	APYM, YMT, Office Administrator, Business Affairs	By 8/31/16		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan for restricted use of field

Youth

Our youth are at the center of the conditions we are trying to address. These students are a blessing to the congregation and they bring with them vibrancy, creativity and joy in all they do with our church. Our programs for youth are varied and made to meet many different needs; however, too often we find students who are no longer active or unable to find a place within our programs that keeps them motivated to stay involved. The reality of today is that church activities are actively competing with outside activities and school for the time and attention of our students, and without church being a life-changing experience we risk losing them.

Need for connections

- We want to ensure that programs for youth are not one-size-fits-all, but rather meet students where they are. For some, that involvement may only be with the music programs or mission trips. We look to all programs where youth participate as vital to their growth as a Christian and seek ways for them to learn and grow into a life of faith.
- An uncomfortable student is one who is going to have a difficult time coming back. Parental pushing will work to a certain point, but if that student is unable to make a connection to other students or leaders, they won't be as motivated to stay for their own reasons.
- Games and activities at the church should focus on engagement and teamwork, not isolation. Adult leaders should look for students who may get lost in the shuffle of a church-wide game to ensure that everyone stays part of a team.
- Another type of connection is with others who are not like themselves in situations which are not like their own situation. Opportunities like mission trips are ways to bring about changes in how our students, many who come from positions of having enough and growing up in safety, see the world around them and learn to receive from other. Further opportunities to deepen this engagement should be sought so that our students can continue to learn and be part of the world around them.
- Church should be a place of sanctuary for our youth, where they can be themselves and be accepted for who they are and the gifts they have been given.
- The sense of community should be encouraged outside of the church to wherever students gather, be it school or other ecumenical settings. Further consideration should be given to bringing members of other Christian organizations like FCA into our church for additional fellowship opportunities.

Differing levels of Christian maturity demand different opportunities to engage

- The path to a full and meaningful relationship with Jesus is not a prescribed path and certainly not one that is the same for each person. Some students come to church for the first time while in high school while the person sitting next to them might not have missed a Sunday in 10 years. Lacking even a basic vocabulary for being a Christian can be a hurdle for a student to become involved, which means not only different ways are needed to engage newer or less involved Christian youth, but different goals are needed for each child as markers on their path. Each student's journey is different.
- For some youth, the programs or activities that speak most to them or that utilize gifts that might not be obvious are going to be the way that they connect. Youth involvement doesn't mean faithful

attendance at JHF or SHF. Encouraging a variety of programs and activities is required, and that means enough adult Leaders and Volunteers to build and sustain these programs.

- Leadership opportunities for those students who are confident in their Christianity should be identified with other kids who are less confident or just starting out. Having students model their faith to other students with reinforcement from leaders will be important.

Entry Points

- Where are the entry points where kids come back (3rd grade Bibles, 8th grade Confirmation, etc.) and how do we grab the kids while we have them?

Goal #5 – Youth

To ensure that First Presbyterian Church is a place where youth find many varied opportunities to connect and thrive, we propose that a comprehensive vision for student ministries be refined by Spring 2017, so that our students deepen their faith and find many ways to participate in the active life of the church.

What must you accomplish?	By whom?	By when?	With what?	How will you measure success?
Develop a vision for comprehensive student participation, engaging as many youth people as possible in the total life of the church.	APYM, YMT	Spring 2017		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building upon work done by previous APYMs, SDT and YMT, refresh vision for student participation.
Select a subset of students and work with them to identify goals. Utilize this information to develop a larger program for all students.	APYM, SLT	Fall 2016		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define goals for a subset of students. • A plan for how this could be implemented across all students.