

## YOUTH (TEEN) MINISTRY RE-IMAGINED

On September 1, 2016, I accepted the assignment of Youth Director at University Church. I knew that while we had yet to see our teen ministry realized — the soil was good and if we remained patient the soil would not only be good **but ready** for what could be planted. I have spent the past three years listening to everybody and anybody who has something to say or an investment into how youth ministry should be done at University Church. We should do Youth Sundays. We should implement youth more into the broader life of the church. We should teach them Bible literacy. We should have Confirmation. We should have mentors. We should do more fun stuff. They should volunteer. They should believe in justice. They should collaborate with the youth at the Blue Gargoyle. While these are all noble and worthy goals for youth programming, **what I have come to know** is that there is a huge gap in our listening. What the adults of University Church desires are for young people, while sincere, often times cannot align with youth desires and needs if we are not listening to them for understanding. **Well intended adults think we understand what youth mean when they say they want to be more involved in the life of the church, because we know how and in what ways we would like them to be more involved.** We are mistaken and they are not understood. Yet, as a congregation, there is hope!! **I am inviting us to be more curious about youth** — *who they believe they are (Identity), how they believe they belong (Belonging), and in what ways they believe they matter (Purpose).*

### So, what do we do?

I would invite us into the spiritual practice of repentance. To repent means to feel remorse for the ways in which we miss the mark — and this remorse should invite us into new life by turning away from old habits and ways. Let us (adults) both repent (be remorseful) and turn away from youth ministry as we think it should be done personally and collectively — and let's walk into a collective understanding that we are committed to listening to our youth for understanding. Let us have faith that if we do the work of listening for understanding faith-filled and creative youth programming will emerge.

### How will we be held accountable to this intentional listening?

Fuller Youth Institute (FYI), a research institution affiliated with Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, invited us to apply for their Living A Better Story (LABS) Project. The LABS Project is a cohort of 15 local churches in the Chicagoland and surrounding suburbs engaged in a 2-year experiment — given steps and tools by FYI — to re-imagine discipling and ministering to youth that will develop into youth programming for our church context. Since we have been accepted, our church team has completed the first summit (Feb. 3-4) for the LABS Project and have learned that this will take time, commitment and faith.

“... the race is not to the swift... but to those who endure.” Ecclesiastes 9:11

Our next step is to listen. We will spend the next 3 months listening to our youth by inviting them into one-on-one conversations with questions centered around their sense of Identity, sense of Belonging and sense of Purpose. *Our plan is to have a youth focus group kick-back (kick-off) Saturday, February 29 @ 6pm at the church as a fun and honest introduction into these one-on-one conversations.* **We cannot hear the voices of our youth if they are not present.** So, if you have a teenager in your care we want to strongly encourage you to bring them to this kick-back and engage with them in this process.

## **How can you contribute to our first next step?**

If you are interested in the information that will emerge from these one-on-one conversations with youth, then we are inviting you to be a part of the Listening Task Force. Once all one-on-one conversations are conducted, the Listening Task Force will convene to listen to the findings of these conversations. The Listening Task Force will help the core team extract and solidify the themes around how youth define their Identity, Belonging and Purpose (IBP).

If interested, please send an email to [Ramona](#), with the subject line put “Listening Task Force.” Additionally, if you are reading this and are beginning to wander into life for you as a teen, in the world and in the church, we invite you to share that story with us. Tell us your story around Identity, Belonging and Purpose (IBP) as a teen by sending an email to [Ramona](#), with the subject line “Teen IBP Story.”

**Link to [“People are not projects” Video](#)**