AYME

Association of Youth Ministry Educators

A COMMUNITY OF CHRIST-CENTERED SCHOLARS



33rd Annual Conference

October 23-25, 2026 • Dallas, Texas

Relational Evangelism & Discipleship

www. aymeducators.org

AYME Association of Youth Ministry Educators

A COMMUNITY OF CHRIST-CENTERED SCHOLARS

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AYME Association *of* Youth Ministry Educators

A COMMUNITY OF CHRIST-CENTERED SCHOLARS

Welcome from the Conference Director

October 23, 2026

Dear AYME friends and colleagues,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, it is my distinct pleasure to welcome you to the 2026 Association of Youth Ministry Educators' Conference. Whether you are a longtime member or joining us for the very first time, we are grateful for the unique perspective, experience, and voice you bring to our community.

This year, our focus centers on Relational Evangelism and Discipleship**.** Together, we will seek to deepen our understanding of relational youth ministry across diverse communities, identify and confront the gaps that limit relational discipleship in practice, and inspire scholarly collaboration that can help shape the future of relational youth ministry education.

We know that young people's faith is profoundly shaped through trusted, life-sharing relationships with caring Christian adults. If relational discipleship is central to how young people encounter and grow in faith, then it must also be central to how we educate and form the people that will walk alongside them. Our work has a multiplying effect. The conversations we have, the research we pursue, and the ways we prepare future youth ministry leaders will likely influence curriculum, training, research, and field practice for years to come.

One of the greatest gifts of this conference is the opportunity to learn from one another. AYME brings together educators, equippers and practitioners with a remarkable range of experience and expertise. We encourage you to attend the breakout sessions, engage thoughtfully in conversations, and share what you are learning from your own context. AYME is a collaborative effort. What makes this community formative is each of us; people committed to the work of forming future leaders. We learn as much from one another through informal conversations as we do through formal programming.

Thank you for your continued dedication to serving Christ's Church and to shaping the future of youth ministry education. May this weekend be a time of profound professional growth, encouragement, spiritual refreshment, and new or *renewed* collaboration and connection.

Ebonie Davis

Ebonie Davis
AYME VP & Conference Chair, 2026

Board of Directors: Dave Keehn, Ebonie Davis, Mike Langford, Kevin Turner, Michael Mauriello, Tommy Carrington, Richard Griffith, Gord Nickerson, Caleigh Smith, Randy Davis, Richelle White, Mark Cannister, Jay Sedwick, David Odom

GENERAL SESSION SPEAKERS



Mike King, D.Min., serves as president of YouthFront in Kansas City, an organization creating environments for youth to experience spiritual transformation, and providing support to churches and youth workers. Mike also serves on the pastoral staff of Jacob's Well Church in Kansas City and is a frequent speaker at conferences and conventions. He and his wife, Vicki, have two sons, a daughter and two daughters-in-law. Read Mike's blog at www.king.typepad.com.



Alex Mathew, MS., spend a decade serving with Youth for Christ in Kansas City creating a collaborative movement through high-quality Christian mentoring to help high-risk young people acquire and develop a way of living taught by Jesus Christ. More recently he has been serving with YouthFront as director of YouthFront Pathways to positively impact youth and families living in the urban areas of Kansas City.



Josh Packard, Ph.D., was the founding Executive Director of Springtide Research Institute and more recently the co-founder of Futures of Faith. He is one of the foremost experts in the spiritual lives of modern American youth and an accomplished researcher in the sociology of religion and new forms of religious expression. He has authored numerous books and articles in both popular and academic outlets. His most recent publication is *Faithful Futures: Sacred Tools for Engaging Emerging Generations* (Baker Academic, 2025). Learn more about Josh at www.joshpackard.com.



Lakisha Lockhart, Ph.D., serves as Associate Professor of Christian Education at Union Presbyterian Seminary. Her teaching takes seriously the benefits and necessity of play, movement, aesthetics, creative arts, and embodiment. For Lakisha, the body is a locus for doing theology and theological reflection. Ordained to ministry in the non-denominational tradition, she recognizes the importance of teaching Christian education for the strengthening of the church. Her focus on practical pedagogy is not only to develop more committed and knowledgeable educators and ministers, but also more committed and knowledgeable congregants.



Virginia Ward, D.Min., has taught in Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary's urban ministry program and serves as associate pastor at the Abundant Life Church in Cambridge, MA. More recently, Virginia and her husband, have established a consulting company called Wards of Wisdom Associates. This company provides support to urban ministries seeking transformative change. Dr. Ward's expertise has been recognized through her contributions to *Every Woman's Bible* (Tyndall House) and her co-authorship of the book *5 Views on the Future of Youth Ministry: Perspectives on What Could or Should Be* (The Youth Cartel).

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Relational Evangelism and Discipleship

Daily Schedule

FRIDAY, October 23, 2026

4:00-6:00pm Registration and Exhibits Open
6:00-8:30pm Dinner & General Session #1 with Dr. Mike King & Mr. Alex Mathew (Grand Ballroom)
8:30-10:00pm Dessert Reception in the Grand Atrium

SATURDAY, October 24, 2026

7:00-9:00am Complementary Breakfast in the Hotel Atrium, Exhibits Open
9:00-9:45am Breakout Presentations 1 (Grand 1B, Grand 1C, Grand 4A, Grand 4B, Grand 4C)
9:45-10:15am Coffee Break (Grand Atrium)
10:15-11:00am Breakout Presentations 2 (Grand 1A, Grand 1B, Grand 1C, Grand 4A, Grand 4B)
11:00-11:30am Coffee Break (Grand Atrium)
11:30-12:15pm Research Presentations 3 (Grand 1A, Grand 1B, Grand 1C, Grand 4A, Grand 4B)

12:45-2:30pm Lunch, Business Meeting & General Session #2 with Dr. Josh Packard (Grand Ballroom)
2:30-2:45 Refreshment Break (Grand Atrium)
2:45-3:30pm Breakout Presentations 4 (Grand 1A, Grand 1B, Grand 1C, Grand 4A, Grand 4B)
3:45-5:00pm General Session #3 with Dr. Lakisha Lockhart (Grand Ballroom)

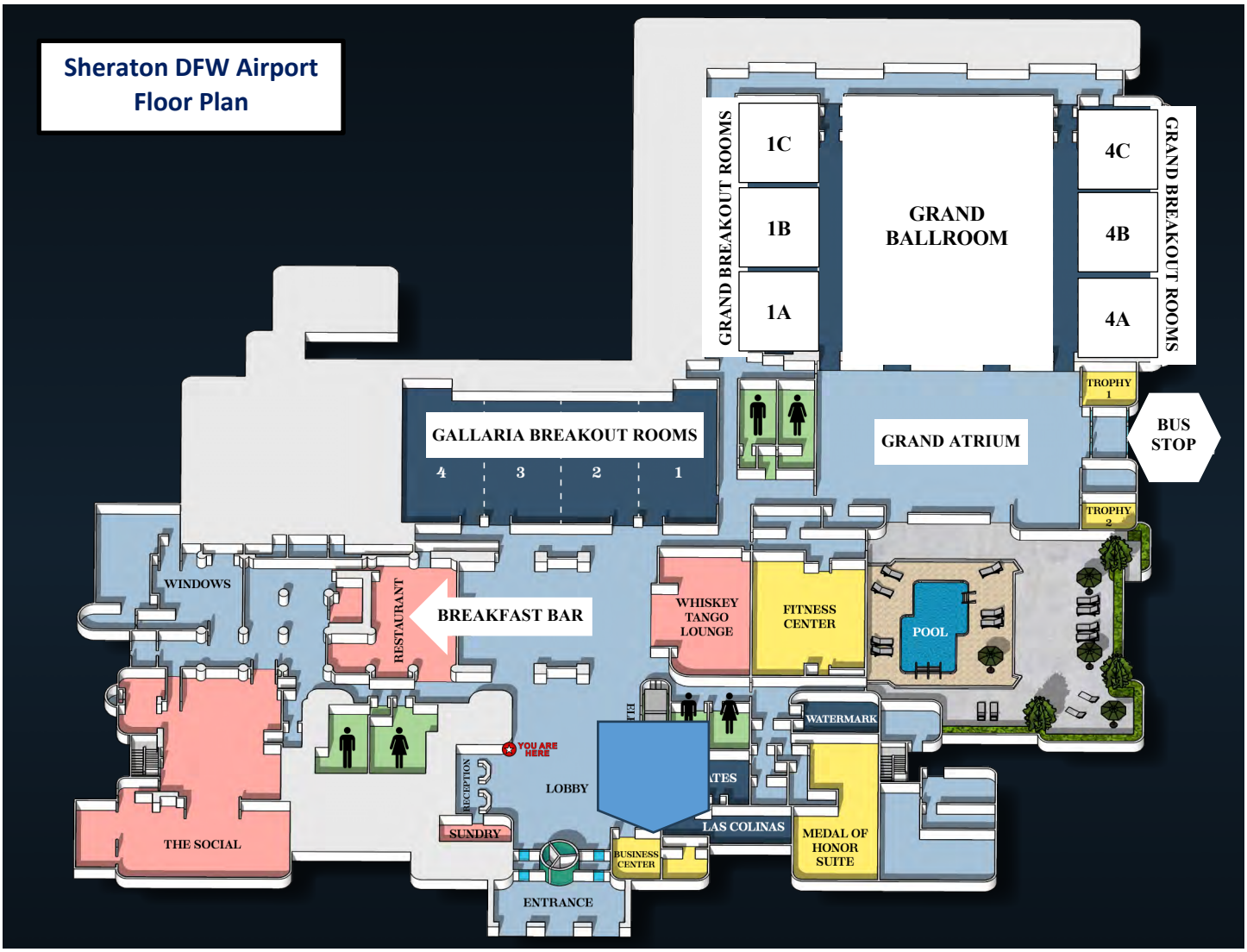
5:30-8:00pm Dinner at Hard Eight BBQ (See page 14 for menu)
5:30pm First bus departs from Grand Atrium doors. (not the front door of the hotel)
5:50pm Second bus departs from Grand Atrium doors. (not the front door of the hotel)

SUNDAY, October 25, 2026

7:00-9:00am Complementary Breakfast in the Hotel Atrium, Exhibits Open
9:00-9:45am Community Worship (Grand Ballroom)
10:15-11:30am General Session #4 with Dr. Virginia Ward (Grand Ballroom)
11:30am Conference Closes — See you in Milwaukee for AYME 2027!

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Scholastic Achievement Award

Each year AYME members serving as faculty members are welcome to nominate students for the AYME Scholastic Achievement Award.

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Award Criteria

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- Achievement of an excellent academic record
- Provided excellent leadership in the practice of youth ministry
- Developed exceptional potential for future youth ministry

Please submit your request for awards online by April 15th.

www.AYMEducators.org/award

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GEORGE W. TRUETT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

FTE

Breakout Presentations 1

Saturday, October 24 @ 9:00-9:45am

Blue = Research Papers
Red = Professional Development
Green = Book Highlights

Grand 1B

Kinberly Nollan, Tiffani Hutton, and Tanita Maddox – Young Life

Embodied Faith in a Digital Age: Next Gen Discussions Faith, Relationships and Identity

Despite rising digital connectivity, Gen Z and Gen Alpha face increasing isolation, loneliness, and mental health challenges. Research indicates that adolescents deeply desire authentic, face-to-face community over digital interaction. The results of a qualitative study are shared revealing that faith formation is primarily driven by embodied, relational ministry—rather than programs or content. Practical strategies to build relationships and relational discipleship are shared to help young people feel truly valued, known, and to develop their faith.

Grand 1C

Megan Brown, Tyler Schwaab, Ella Brenden – University of Northwestern, St. Paul

Youth Ministry and Relational Discipleship

This qualitative study examines how youth ministry professionals and volunteer leaders practice relational discipleship with middle and high school students. Through interviews with youth ministry leaders, the study explores approaches that contribute to students' faith development and church engagement. Findings reveal recurring themes including authentic relationships, biblical application, spiritual practices, service, leadership opportunities, and extending discipleship beyond the weekly youth-group setting. Specific findings will be discussed during the presentation.

Grand 4A

Tom Bergler – Huntington University

Youth Discipleship in the New Identity Ecosystem

Today's young people are growing up in an identity society (Côté) characterized by expressive individualism (Taylor, Trueman), the self-reflexive imperative (Smith & Adamczyk), the great re-wiring of childhood (Haidt), concerted cultivation parenting, and low trust in institutions (Packer). To form spiritually mature adults in this new identity ecosystem, the Church must 1) craft contextualized theologies of identity 2) release Christian parenting and mentoring from cultural captivity and 3) build environments that form distinctively Christian identities.

Grand 4B

Ryan Morgan – Saint Paul University

Re-Thinking the Spiritual Formation of an Anxious Generation: Christian Theology and Existential Psychotherapy

The paradoxical loneliness and anxiety of young people were cemented into public consciousness with Jonathan Haidt's landmark book "The Anxious Generation" in 2024. Despite best efforts, attempts to address the spiritual vacuum at the root of what Victor Frankl called the "spiritual disease" of meaninglessness are frequently subverted by superficial response. Reflecting theologically on the insights of existential psychology, this paper explores the means of Christian spiritual formation among the anxious generation.

Grand 4C

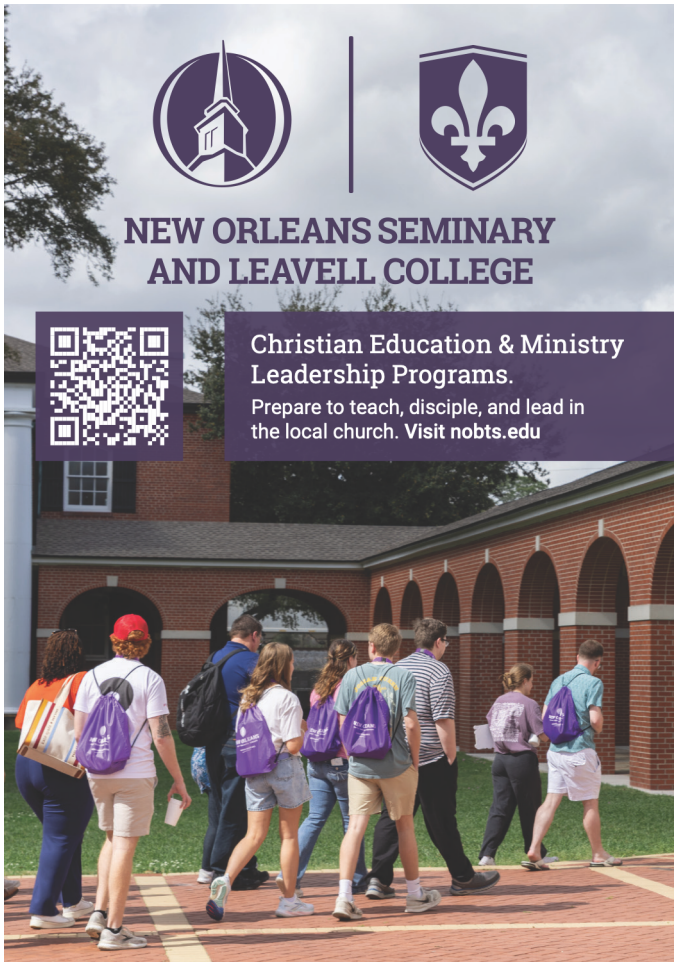
Clark Fobes – Asian American Christian Collaborative

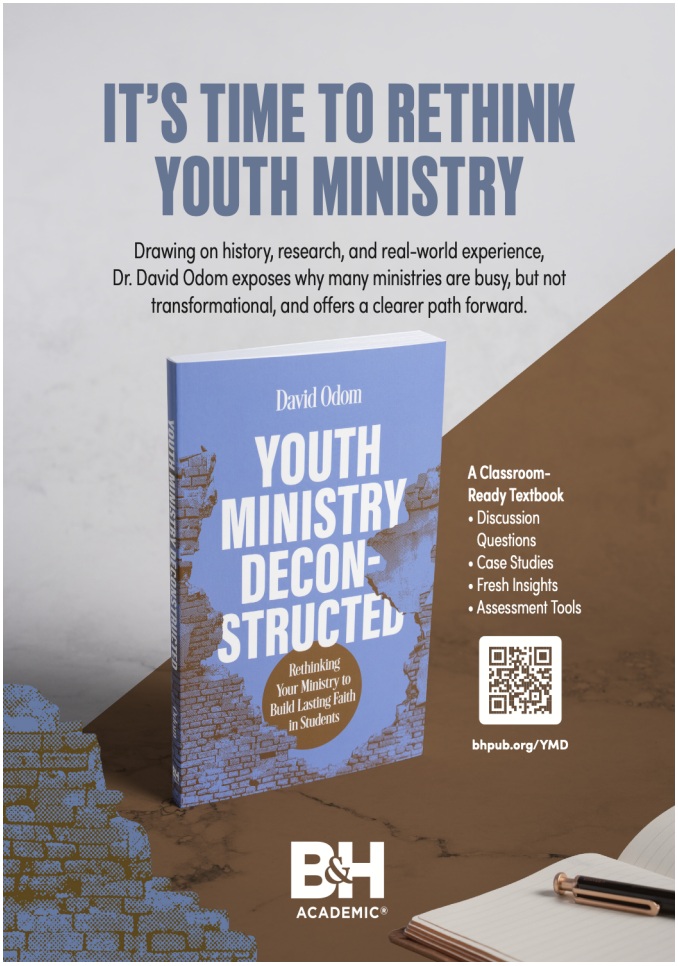
Evangelizing the Next Generation in a Post-Christian, Post-Secular Age

How do we reach a generation that has grown up largely without the Christian faith? Growing up in a post-Christian, post-secular culture, the morality of young people today is more akin to the communal honor-shame cultures of the East than the individualistic guilt-innocence culture of the West. Reaching this generation requires adapting our missiological principles and learning from faith communities that have a history of functioning as a pilgrim people from the margins. Doing so provides us with a holistic model of evangelism.

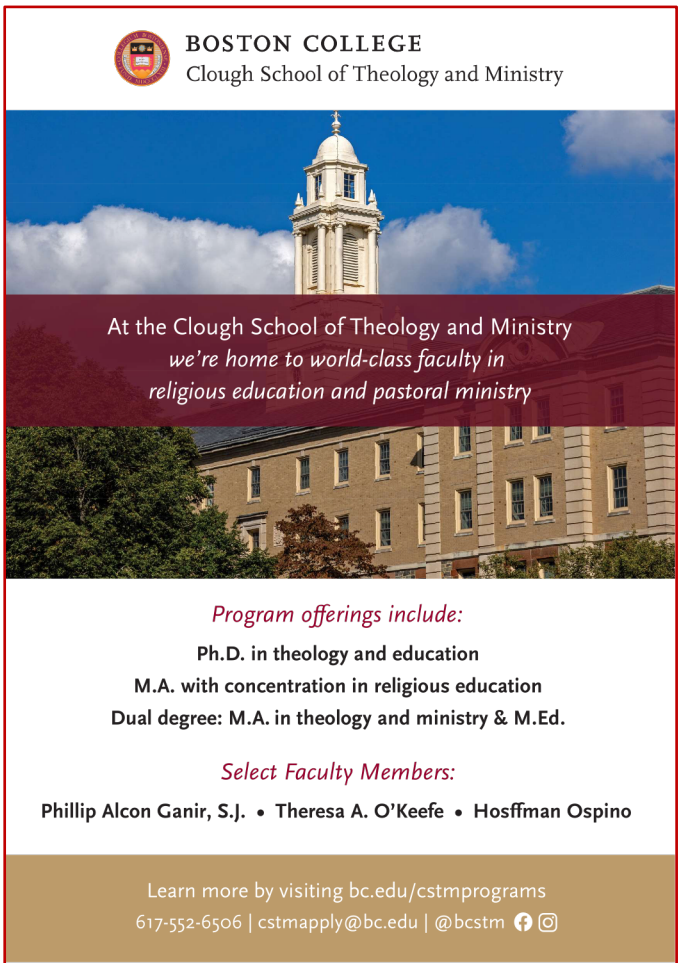
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Breakout Presentations 2
Saturday, October 24 @ 10:15-11:00am

Blue = Research Papers
Red = Professional Development
Green = Book Highlights

Grand 1A

Dudley Chancey – Intergenerational Faith Center, Oklahoma Christian University and
Young Woon Lee – Religious Support Office, U.S. Army Fort Hood

Passing on the Faith: Keeping Faith Alive – A Ministry for Grandparents Integrating with the Next Generation in U.S. and Korean Contexts

Healthy grandparents do not replace parents in raising the next generation but reinforce the parental role, protect the relationships around the child, and tell the story of what God has done in their own lives. In 2025 we surveyed and interviewed grandparents in U.S. (N=995). In 2026 Young Lee administered the same questionnaire in Korea (N=220), by survey only. Because the identical instrument produced identical U.S. figures in both datasets, the comparison rests on a stable base. What differs is the answer.

Grand 1B

LaTasha Nesbitt – Fuller Youth Institute

Adults Matter: Exploring Access to Supportive Adults and Relational Outcomes in Generation Alpha

This paper uses survey and interview data with Generation Alpha adolescents to show how access to supportive adults shapes faith, engagement, identity, mental health, and belonging. Findings highlight respect, inclusion, and space for questions as core to relational evangelism and discipleship. Implications for youth ministry educators include training future youth ministers in relational competencies, designing field experiences that prioritize trusted adult presence, and modeling teaching practices that normalize doubt and invite deep, respectful dialogue.

Grand 1C

Tommy Carrington – Taylor University

Reclaiming Foundational Principles for Reaching a Fragmented Generation

Generations Z and Alpha are defined by an intense desire for authenticity, systemic fairness, and active justice. The key to reaching younger generations is not a new cultural strategy, but a return to the Bible's clear mandate of loving and serving others. This paper addresses issues that are particularly relevant to this generation and proposes a biblical framework for communicating the truths of Scripture in ways that connect with their experiences while remaining faithful to God's revealed purposes in Scripture.

Grand 4A

Dave Rahn – TEN x 10

JESUS IS LORD: Research as Fresh Listening in Relational Youth Discipleship

Because Jesus is Lord, Christian scholarship begins with fresh listening for what he is already doing before seeking to explain it. This paper explores how research can become an act of humble collaboration with the living Christ. Integrating a personal "cold case" from the Jesus Movement, decades of student leadership research, and an examination of blind spots within the church's imagination, participants are invited to consider how listening-as-scholarship can serve relational youth discipleship.

Grand 4B

David Odom – New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

Book Highlight of Youth Ministry Deconstructed

Youth Ministry Deconstructed challenges long-held assumptions about youth ministry by proposing a reconstruction of ministry around biblical discipleship, intergenerational relationships, and lasting faith formation. The presentation introduces five evaluative metrics developed throughout the book: biblical, discipleship, ministry, process, and environmental. This session offers educators and practitioners a research-informed vision for rethinking youth ministry in today's cultural context.

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D6 FAMILY MINISTRY

Breakout Presentations 3

Saturday, October 24 @ 11:30-12:15pm

Blue = Research Papers
Red = Professional Development
Green = Book Highlights

Grand 1A

Tom Combes, Kim Nollan, Tanita Maddox, Arthur Satterwhite – Young Life

A Theological Framework for Relational Youth Evangelism and Discipleship: From Relational Technique to Incarnational Witness

Relational youth ministry has existed for more than 80 years — but is it practiced as a calling or merely as a technique? This paper argues that Darrell Guder's framework of Incarnational Witness, expressed through sacrificial friendship and proclamation, offers a more demanding and theologically coherent vision for relational ministry. Drawing on Young Life's RELATE project and current Gen Z research, the paper contends that authentic Incarnational Witness is mutually transformative — conforming the youth worker to the likeness of Christ.

Grand 1B

Rogelio Paquini – Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University

In Their Language: The Need to Contextualize Youth Discipleship

Today's changing society makes younger generations a vital mission field. Effective discipleship requires understanding generational differences and the modern, postmodern, and metamodern worldviews shaping them. This study examines intergenerational discipleship through a missional lens, stressing contextualization. It proposes mentorship, collaborative learning, and culturally relevant faith expressions to bridge generational divides, and calls for discipleship that speaks the next generation's language and invites them into transformative faith.

Grand 1C

David Odom – New Orlean Baptist Theological Seminary

Development of the Student Spiritual Growth and Influence Survey

This paper presents the development of the Student Spiritual Growth and Influence Survey, a quantitative instrument designed to assess discipleship among adolescents in the local church. Addressing the need for measurable and theologically grounded evaluation tools in youth ministry, the survey captures two primary constructs: Spiritual Growth and Spiritual Influence. This presentation will highlight the theoretical framework, development process, and practical applications of the survey.

Grand 4A

Alexis Larios – Boston College Clough School of Theology & Ministry

What's in a Name? Toward a Relational Theology of Naming Through the Lens of U.S. Hispanic/Latinx Contexts

This paper addresses the conference theme through a theological exploration of name/naming, doing so through a case study of the U.S. Hispanic/Latinx population. Engaging the thinking of Linda Martín Alcoff, Janet Soskice, and Hannah Malcolm, it argues for a theological framework for naming that is integrally linked to Christian belonging. Ultimately, this paper calls youth ministers and educators to move toward practices of naming that are relational.

Grand 4B

Ray Chan – Asian American Christian Collaborative

Latest research on…..

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Grand 4C

Mike Severe – Taylor University and Brian Hull – Asbury University

Book Highlight of Youth Becoming: Transformative Practices for Forming Young Leaders

Youth Becoming is a compilation of hard-won wisdom drawing form ten years of innovative projects in youth ministry. Centering on practical theology and innovative programming, the work communicates practices of the Christian life undertaken by thousands of teenagers across more than 100 institutions and universities.



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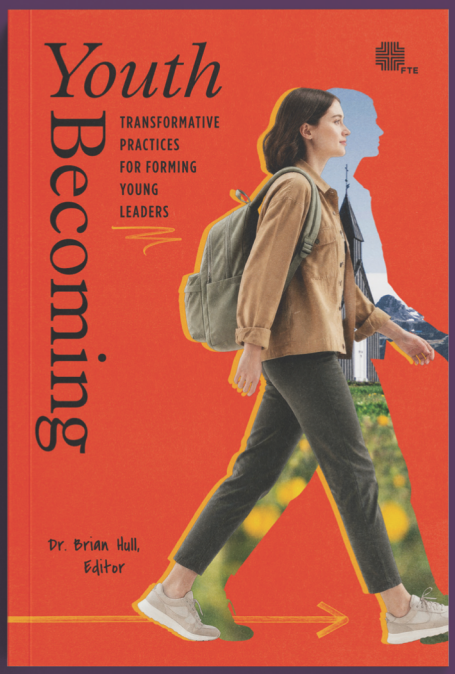
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Breakout Presentations 4

Saturday, October 24 @ 2:45pm-3:30pm

Blue = Research Papers
Red = Professional Development
Green = Book Highlights

Grand 1A

Caleigh Smith and Brian Hull – Asbury University and Jim Hampton – Asbury Theological Seminary

Spiritual Formation as TBRI Practices for Late Adolescent College Students

Asbury University hosts a Lilly-funded Institute: Youth Becoming Leaders (YBL) with a primary goal: "To enable high school students to value the role of the Christian community (especially the role of the local church) in forming and fulfilling personal calling and God's mission to culture." This research on eight years of participant data suggests YBL's effectiveness stems from how we create and model a Culture of Yes, proposing practical applications for those working with youth.

Grand 1B

Eric Carter – Baylor Center for Disability and Flourishing, Baylor University

Barriers to Believing and Belonging: What Youth Ministry Leaders Say Gets in the Way of Inclusive Ministry

What hinders the full participation and belonging of youth with disabilities and mental health conditions in church? Drawing on a national survey of 184 youth ministry leaders, this study examines the barriers that can shape inclusive ministry and the factors associated with them. We will consider the implications of these findings for preparing youth ministers, strengthening ministry practices and supports, and creating congregational environments in which young people with disabilities and mental health conditions can participate, contribute, grow in faith, and belong.

Grand 1C

Ebenezer Hagan – Centre for Youth Research and Development, Pentecost University, Accra Ghana

Teaching Beyond the Pain: An Exegetical Study of Luke 24:13-35 and Its Implications for Ministering to Hurting Students

Contemporary youth face psychological, social, emotional, and spiritual struggles that challenge youth ministry educators to serve as mentors and healers, not just teachers. This study examines Luke 24:13-35 (the Emmaus Road narrative) as a teaching paradigm, showing how Jesus used presence, empathetic listening, contextualized instruction, and scriptural interpretation to restore wounded disciples. It proposes a restorative youth ministry model prioritizing relational engagement and spiritual formation alongside cognitive learning for ministering to hurting students.

Grand 4A

Kerry Loescher – Oral Robert University

Motivation Factors of Volunteer Yodas in Local Church Youth Ministry

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away, Yoda helped a young Skywalker become a Jedi Master. What motivated Yoda to do that? This qualitative study explores the motivation experiences of middle-aged and older adults who become persistent volunteers in local church youth ministry. Findings include on-ramps for initial participation, key transitions in motivation factors for ongoing faithful engagement, and critical volunteer recruitment and retention strategies.

Grand 4B

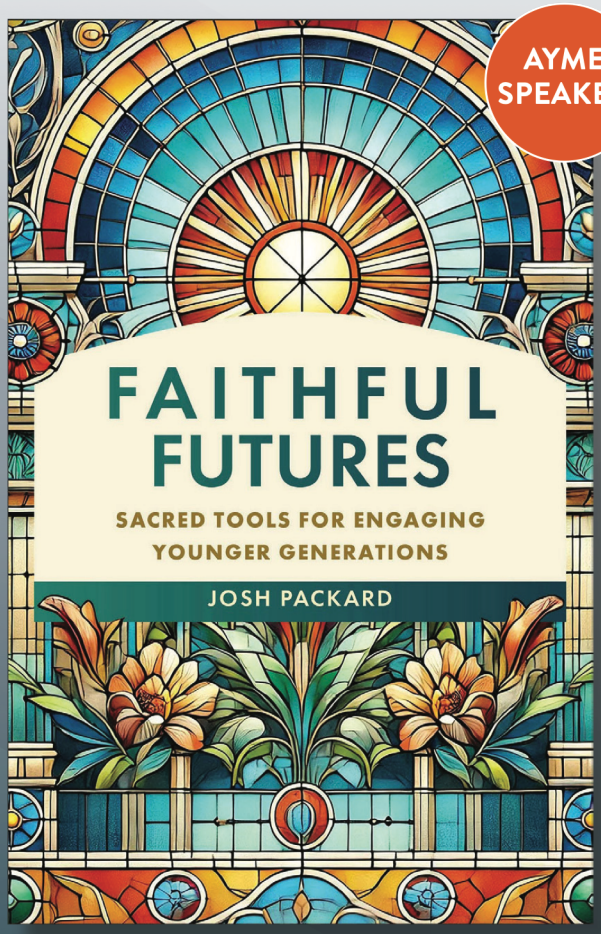
Jay Sedwick – Dallas Theological Seminary

Best Practices for Online Learning

Online education had been gaining in popularity but was catapulted forward by COVID. Whether friend or foe of online education, there is no turning back the clock. The reality across the educational spectrum is that online education now claims a large share of all educational delivery paradigms. Participants in this seminar will learn best practices for online course design and online teaching whether their context includes asynchronous, live synchronous, or hybrid delivery modes.

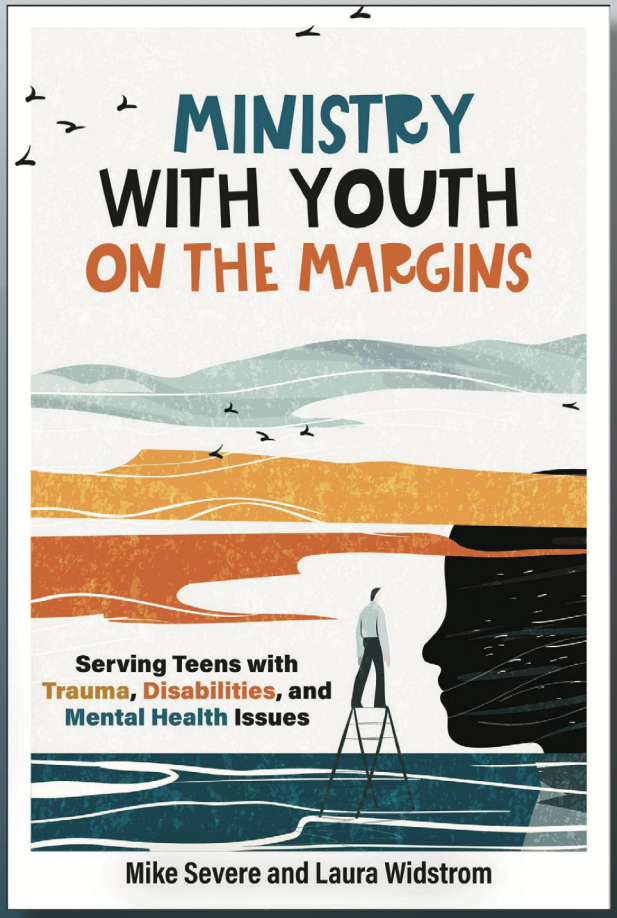
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"This book is a must-read for any youth worker committed to a fully inclusive, welcoming youth ministry."

–**ELIZABETH W. CORRIE,** Candler School of Theology



COMING FEBRUARY 2027

Saturday Evening Dinner & Fellowship at the Hard Eight BBQ



Dinner Menu

Sliced Brisket
Regular and Jalapeno Sausage
Sliced Turkey
Southern Style Green Beans
Ranch Style Pinto Beans
Potato Salad
Mac & Cheese
Banana Pudding

All food is Gluten Free except for the Mac & Cheese and Banana Pudding.

Bus Schedule

The Hard Eight BBQ is just a 10-minute ride from the hotel. The bus will make two trips.

5:30 PM First bus departs from the Grand Atrium bus stop, just outside the Grand Ballroom.

5:50 PM Second bus departs from the Grand Atrium bus stop, Just Outside the Grand Ballroom.

Bus departs from the Grand Atrium bus stop doors *not* from the front doors of the hotel.

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Helping faith matter more for 10 million young people over 10 years

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Who We Are

TENx10 is a collaborative discipleship movement of more than 200 diverse US ministry organizations working together to make faith matter more for ten million young people over ten years, in the spirit of John 10:10. We work together across denominational, racial, and cultural lines to elevate relational discipleship radically focused on Jesus and transform the ecosystem of Christianity in the US.

Why It Matters

Every year, more than a million young people walk away from faith. TENx10 exists to help turn this tipping point into a turning point by rallying and equipping all parts of the Church to embody relational discipleship radically focused on Jesus for the faith of the next generation.

How We Work

TENx10 focuses on supporting, not duplicating, the work of existing ministries. Through our Ecosystem Change team, we strengthen minority-led and minority-serving partners, conduct research, shape narratives through media and convenings, and equip leaders to address the challenges of today's youth.

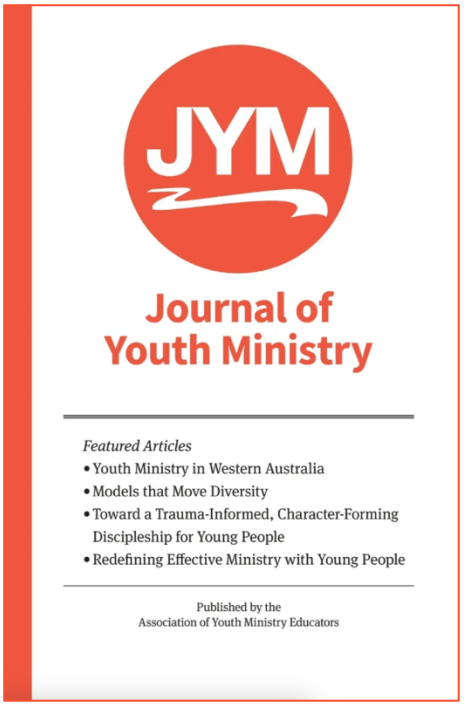
Join the Movement

Whether you are a youth leader, senior pastor or priest, invested family member, or ministry partner, there is a place for you in this movement. Explore resources and training, learn more about upcoming TENx10 events, and discover how you can connect with TENx10 partners at TENx10.org.



Learn more at TENx10.org

Journal of Youth Ministry



Christian youth ministry exists to share the biblical truths of God's redemptive love with adolescents and facilitate their journey of becoming genuine disciples of Jesus Christ. As youth ministry educators, we are called to prepare, refresh and challenge current and future youth ministers.

The *Journal of Youth Ministry* is intended to be a peer-reviewed medium through which professional youth ministry educators may share with, encourage, and challenge each other through our various academic and practical disciplines related to youth ministry education. This journal allows us to share research, promote critical thinking, and encourage innovation associated with the practice and theory of Christian youth ministry.

The journal is composed of articles, book reviews, and research reviews. Research articles are peer reviewed. While occasionally essays pertaining to current issues are published, articles most often take the form of research, and/or praxis. Research articles may use theoretical, empirical, quantitative, qualitative, ethnographic, applied or any other accepted method of scholarly research. Exploratory articles focusing on research in progress are also appropriate for the journal. Praxis articles which lay a strong theological, philosophical, or other theoretical foundation for the practice of youth ministry or the education of youth ministry professionals are also welcomed.

The journal is published twice a year in April and October by the Association of Youth Ministry Educators. The editorial board is comprised of the editors and the board members of the Association of Youth Ministry Educators.

JOURNAL EDITORS

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