



Association of Youth
Ministry Educators

A COMMUNITY OF CHRIST-CENTERED SCHOLARS

*Teaching in the Midst
of Hurting Students*

32nd Annual Conference

Embassy Suites Downtown, Des Moines, Iowa

October 17-19, 2025



www.aymeducators.org



Association *of* Youth
Ministry Educators

A COMMUNITY OF CHRIST-CENTERED SCHOLARS

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Association of Youth Ministry Educators

A COMMUNITY OF CHRIST-CENTERED SCHOLARS

Welcome from the Conference Director

October 17, 2025

Dear AYME friends and colleagues,

You might be able to identify with the experience of meeting with a group of colleagues, sitting around a table, struggling to come up with a theme for your next camp, retreat or workshop. As the AYME Board was kicking around ideas for themes for this year's conference, it was almost a "no-brainer" for many of us around that table.

At the time (as continues to be the case), the national news and social media were filled with reports highlighting the devastating trends in anxiety and depression among adolescents and college students. The statistics were staggering, and the societal implications were monumental. We unanimously decided that the most appropriate theme for this year's conference was to be: "Teaching in the Midst of Hurting Students."

It was shortly after we made that decision, that Johnathan Haidt's book was published: "The Anxious Generation," and virtually everyone in academia and beyond, was talking about what Haidt and others describe as "an epidemic of mental illness."

With a background in youth ministry, education and mental health counseling, I accepted the role to Chair this year's conference with great delight, as we will address what is clearly one of the most critical issues facing us in youth ministry education. The plenary sessions will be geared to both prepare us to assist college students who might be struggling with mental health issues, *as well as* helping to prepare *those students* who aspire to be future youth leaders working with the next generation of adolescents.

In addition to the sessions, one of the things we all look forward to immensely, will be the opportunities to dialogue, network, collaborate, and connect with colleagues and friends at AYME. I look forward to connecting with many of you this year, and hope to glean insights from the speakers, and from many of you as we gather around tables and couches.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tommy Carrington".

Tommy Carrington, DMin
AYME VP & Conference Chair, 2025

Board of Directors: Dave Keehn, Tommy Carrington, Kevin Turner, Mike Langford, Michael Mauriello, Ebonie Davis, Richard Griffith, Gord Nickerson, Montague Williams, Mark Cannister, Jay Sedwick, David Odom

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GENERAL SESSION SPEAKERS



Mr. Will Hutcherson is the Founder and Executive Director of Curate Hope that focuses on suicide prevention, and mental health awareness through public and private school assembly presentations. Will earned a master's degree in leadership from Southeastern University and has served as a Next Gen and Student Pastor for over fifteen years. Over the past several years he has become increasingly passionate about finding practical ways to bring hope to kids and teens who are facing increasing amounts of anxiety, depression, and despair. This led to him starting Curate Hope, a non-profit that focuses on suicide prevention, mental health awareness, and partnering with schools, churches, and parents to help heal despair in teens.

Will seeks to build a bridge between the local church and the schools and families that are navigating this mental health crisis. Will speaks in public schools across the country, letting students know that there is always hope. He is a co-author of two books: *SEEN: Healing Despair and Anxiety in Kids and Teens Through the Power of Connection* and *Beyond the Spiral: Why You Shouldn't Believe Everything Anxiety Tells You*. Will lives in Naples, Florida with his wife Arianne and their three kids.



Mrs. Nike Greene is the Founder and Executive director of Triple Threat Mentoring in Portland, Oregon. She is widely regarded as an expert in coaching, mental health and violence reduction strategies. She earned a master's degree in Marriage and Family Therapy at George Fox University and ministers alongside her husband at Abundant Life PDX. She is also the author of *Nike, From Trauma to Triumph*.

Her powerful story of transforming her own life from trauma to triumph, from abuse to healing into leading her own non-profit organization is the inspiration behind her relentless mission to encourage others to change their future. Nike guides organizations and communities through some practical, repeatable, and sustainable frameworks that show the role they can play in transforming our tomorrow.

Nike's endeavors are connected to her passion around collaborative communities, education, engaged families, and celebrating diversity. As a therapist, she believes that healing and unity can build stronger communities. She is known for her many years of experience in violence prevention with schools, community-based organizations, government agencies, and correctional systems.



Dr. Mike Severe serves as Professor of Christian Ministries at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana and Chairs the Master of Arts in Ministry program. He earned his MA in Educational Ministries at Wheaton College and PhD in Education at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Mike has over two decades of experience in youth work with urban and rural at-risk teens.

Mike directs grant initiatives for work with at-risk youth, has published dozens of peer review research articles, and co-authored *The Abide Bible*, *Ministry with Youth in Crisis*, and *A Manual for Ministry Internships*. His next book will be *Ministry with Youth on the Margins: Trauma, Disability and Teens* and his current research project focuses on multicultural youth ministry. He has fostered nearly 40 children and adopted three. While caring for children with trauma is very challenging, Mike says that bringing such children into his home has been the most rewarding work and ministry of his life.

Mike has been a long-time member and contributor to the Association of Youth Ministry Educators, serving on the AYME Board of Directors from 2012-2016. Mike may also hold the unofficial world record for a slinky run down a Mayan Temple.



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Teaching in the Midst of Hurting Students

Daily Schedule

FRIDAY, October 17, 2025

- 4:00-6:00pm Registration and Exhibits Open
6:00-8:30pm Dinner & General Session #1 with Mr. Will Hutcherson (Embassy Ballroom)
8:30-10:00pm Dessert Reception in the Hotel Atrium

SATURDAY, October 18, 2025

- 7:00-9:00am Complementary Breakfast in the Hotel Atrium, Exhibits Open
9:00-9:45am Research Presentations 1 (Salon B, Salon C, Potomac, Platte, Missouri)
9:45-10:15am Coffee Break (Ballroom Foyer)
10:15-11:00am Research Presentations 2 (Salon B, Salon C, Potomac, Platte, Missouri)
11:00-11:30am Refreshment Break (Mississippi)
11:30-12:15pm Research Presentations 3 (Salon B, Salon C, Potomac, Platte, Missouri)

12:45-2:30pm Lunch & General Session #2 with Mr. Will Hutcherson (Embassy Ballroom)
2:45-3:30pm Research Presentations 4 (Salon B, Salon C, Potomac, Platte, Missouri)
3:45-5:00pm General Session #3 with Mrs. Nike Greene (Embassy Ballroom)
Distinguished Youth Ministry Educator Award – Dr. Karen Jones

5:30-9:00pm Food and Fun in Des Moines!
5:30 Leave Hotel Lobby for Dinner at Buzzard Billy's
7:15 Leave dinner for fun and games at Ricochet

SUNDAY, October 19, 2025

- 7:00-9:00am Complementary Breakfast in the Hotel Atrium, Exhibits Open
9:00-9:30am Community Worship (Embassy Ballroom)
9:30-10:00am Business Meeting (Embassy Ballroom)
10:15-11:30am General Session #4 with Dr. Mike Severe (Embassy Ballroom)

11:30am Conference Closes — See you in Dallas, Texas for AYME 2026!



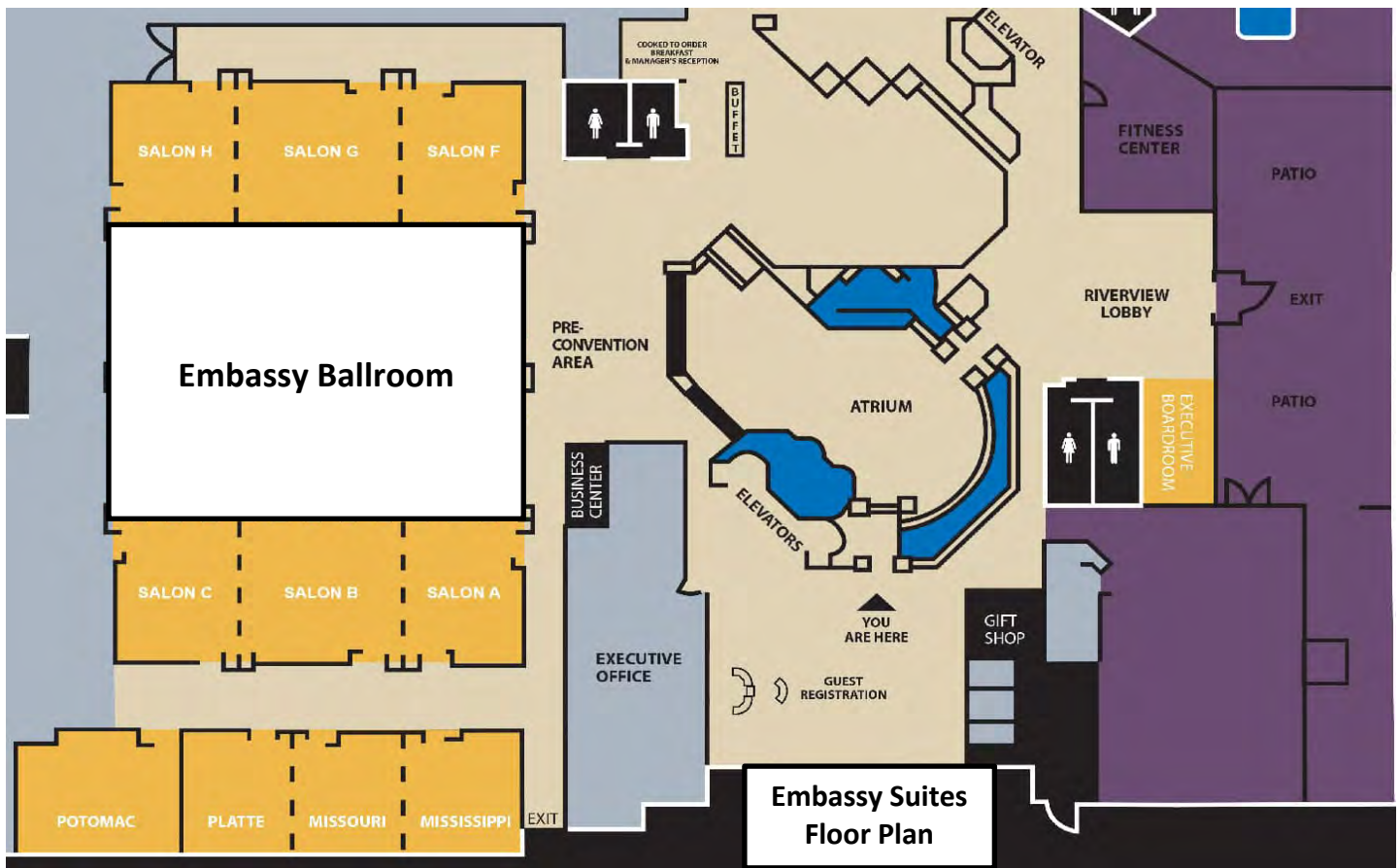


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Scholastic Achievement Award

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

This recognition is intended to provide a special opportunity to honor exemplary students. Each school may nominate one undergraduate, master's degree, and doctoral degree student for the award.

Award Criteria

- Appreciated by peers and supervisors for their exemplary Christian character and spiritual life
- 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





Breakout Presentations 1

Saturday, October 18 @ 9:00-9:45am

Blue = Research Papers

Red = Professional Development

Green = Book Highlights

Salon B

Dave Keehn – Biola University

Thriving as Young Leaders: Understanding the Challenges to New Youth Pastors in Flourishing

This study seeks to understand how the development of flourishing in the lives of young youth ministry leaders, evidenced by the presence of key flourishing building blocks (Everyday Happiness, Resilience, Thriving, Self-Integrity) to identify how youth ministry trainers (parachurch ministries and institutions of higher education) can empower young youth ministry leaders to thrive in the first stage of vocational ministry.

Salon C

Tony Gryskiewicz – Nelson University

Discipling Across Cultures: Spirit-Led Practices in Assembly of God Youth Ministries

This qualitative study examines how Assemblies of God youth pastors engage ethnoculturally diverse teens through Spirit-led, relational discipleship. Interviews with 18 leaders across 13 states revealed a shift from program-driven models to ministries grounded in presence, prayer, and the Holy Spirit. Leaders developed cultural intelligence by listening to insiders and creating safe “third places” for faith and belonging. Despite barriers, they fostered inclusive leadership and measured engagement through Scripture, service, and spiritual growth.

Potomac

Dwayne Ulmer – Wayland Baptist University

Exploring the Processes of Cognitive Disequilibrium and Dissonance in Teaching Youth the Bible for Spiritual Transformation

This paper will explore the strategic integration of cognitive disequilibrium and dissonance in conjunction with the conviction of the Holy Spirit and the potential to impact profound spiritual transformation through biblical teaching. It will examine the roles of discomfort, tension, struggle, disorientation, conflict, and stress and how they engage in the process of spiritual transformation. It will also explore the difference between the teacher introducing cognitive disequilibrium and dissonance and the role of the Holy Spirit through conviction.

Platte

Jordan Francis – Reframe Youth

Reframing Youth Ministry for a New Generation

How do we meaningfully engage a generation navigating social polarization, rapid technological shifts, and widespread institutional distrust? In this breakout, Jordan Francis will share hard-won stories and practical strategies for connecting with today's youth.

Missouri

Ron deVries and Annika Bangma – Generation Spark

Mentoring Matters: Creating Authentic and Sustainable Intergenerational Mentoring Relationships

Mentoring Matters: Creating Authentic and Sustainable Intergenerational Mentoring Relationships Generation Spark was developed to address a growing concern that many young people have walked away from church and the faith. This workshop will address the biblical and research basis of Intergenerational Mentoring and give practical tools to how churches can start sparking connections between generations. Mentoring Matters! And when done properly, it can reverse the trend and sustain faith.



BOSTON COLLEGE

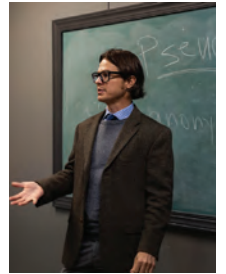
Gloria L. and Charles I.
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Theology and Ministry



Heritage Christian University

About us

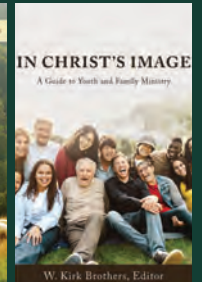
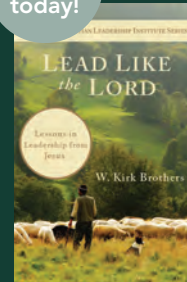
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TENx10

TENx10 is a collaborative movement of more than 170 diverse US ministry organizations and denominations working together to make faith matter more for ten million young people over ten years—in the spirit of John 10:10.

Our strategy is simple. 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. It's not easy, but together we can offer the scholarship, resources, training, and support needed to rally local faith communities to prioritize the next generation and address their most relevant realities so their faith can thrive.

For more information, visit tenx10.org.





Breakout Presentations 2

Saturday, October 18 @ 10:15-11:00am

Blue = Research Papers

Red = Professional Development

Green = Book Highlights

Salon B

Matthew McNutt – Brandywine Valley Church

Exploring Factors Influencing Long-Term Volunteer Engagement and Retention in Student Ministry

This paper examines key factors in volunteer retention in student ministry, identifying practical strategies that foster longevity in volunteers ministering to adolescents. The study employs a mixed-methods approach and draws on biblical truths, current literature, survey results and the interviews. This paper provides recommendations for youth pastors and ministry leaders who recognize the critical need for adolescents to have consistent Christian adults present throughout their middle school and high school years in addition to their parents.

Salon C

LaTasha Nesbitt – Fuller Youth Institute

Exploring Generation Alpha Adolescents and Faith

Exploring Generation Alpha Adolescents and Faith is a mixed-methods research project focused on how young people ages 13 to 17 experience identity, belonging, and purpose (IBP) in connection to faith and spirituality. Through surveys, interviews, and creative, nontraditional methods of data collection, this study seeks to understand how today's adolescents make meaning of religious and spiritual identity in their everyday lives.

Potomac

Jake Mulder – Fuller Theological Seminary

Hope and Healing through Future-Focused Churches

Previous Fuller Youth Institute research has largely focused on what changes may be needed in youth ministry. Based on our yearlong training cohorts with over 1,000 churches, as well as qualitative interviews with 45 leaders from those churches, we've focused on how congregations might make the necessary changes. This seminar will share insights on how these congregations and ministries faithfully and effectively navigate change and how their efforts embody the hope and healing of Jesus.

Platte

Kirk Brothers – Heritage Christian University

Learning to Lead Like the Lord

Looking back on 40+ years in ministry and Christian higher education, the greatest book I have ever read on leadership is the Bible. Many of the leadership traits promoted in business, ministerial, and educational settings today are found throughout Scripture, especially in the ministry of Jesus. This session will focus on leadership lessons I learned while doing a deep dive into Jesus as a leader and the writing of a book, "Lead Like the Lord."

Missouri

Ryan Morgan – Master's College & Seminary

Power in Practice: Christian Ethics Between Practitioners

Most studies on religious power abuse have focused on clergy-parishioner dynamics, not power differentials between ministry practitioners themselves. This study of current and former clergy in the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada from 2022-2024 is indicative of how power abuse occurs, and what role theology plays. As youth ministers who reported experiences of abuse of power were overrepresented, the findings will be presented alongside a model of reflective practice that can be integrated into future seminary coursework.





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of **intergenerational faith and discipleship.**



Scan to learn more.

GENERATION SPARK



Breakout Presentations 3

Saturday, October 18 @ 11:30-12:15pm

Blue = Research Papers

Red = Professional Development

Green = Book Highlights

Salon B

Michael Mauriello – Truett Seminary and Stephanie Bergland – LeTourneau University

ETX Congregational Youth Ministry: Continuing Reports of Teenagers' Experience of Theology, Community, and Worship in East Texas

There exists no thorough description of East Texas (ETX) congregational youth ministries. This paper provides a report of an ongoing multi-method qualitative study which has currently examined 14 Evangelical Protestant ETX congregational youth ministries and Christian ETX teenagers' experiences of community, theology, and worship in those youth ministries.

Salon C

Dudley Chancery – International Faith Center

Youth Ministry Profile-The Harrison Assessment

A pilot study to test the utility of the Harrison Assessment for predicting longevity in youth ministry. Twenty-two youth ministers, who served their churches for 15+ years were given the \$300.00 assessment. The assessment covers 175 traits of the participant. A 62-page report is processed in detail. Youth ministry candidates and churches could make better hiring decisions based on this assessment. Examples will be given.

Potomac

Dave Rahn – TEN x 10

Overcoming Disdain: Resisting Luxury Beliefs to Collaborate for Young People

Does this "luxury belief" exist in youth ministry? Teen struggles can be explained by culture, psychology, or social systems while ignoring sin and Satan. If so, do we harmfully privilege research or program innovation? Creatively based on a Chanel vs. Dollar General metaphor, this paper contrasts status-driven elite approaches with Christ-centered grassroots faithfulness. Drawing on Scripture, case studies, and experience, it invites professors and practitioners to overcome disdain, so Jesus hosts relational youth discipleship collaboration.

Platte

Dave Keehn – Biola University

Enhancing your Internship Program development

Building upon previous research, this Professional Development seminar seeks to present key aspects of various internship models that will produce higher rates of self-reported vocational preparedness in full-time vocational ministry leaders. A time to workshop your internship program's expectations will be provided.

Missouri

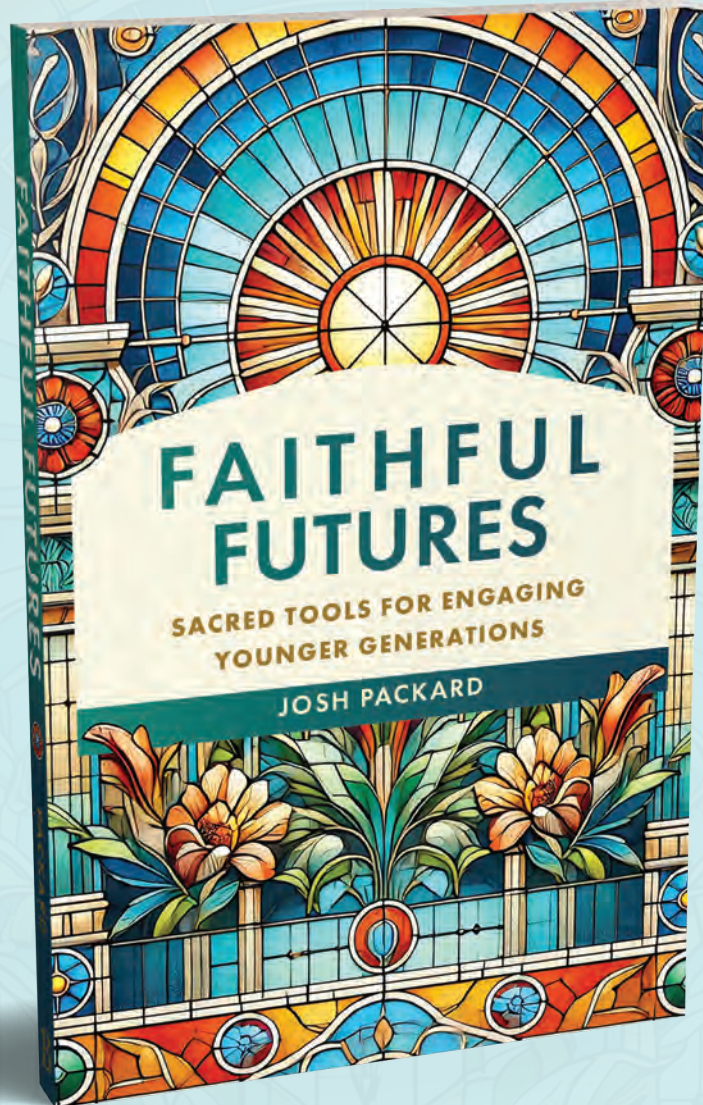
Tanita Maddox – Young Life

A Summary Of What Gen Z Really Wants To Know About God: Seven Questions About Life And Faith

Generation Z (Gen Z) experiences a disconnect with the church, resulting in their absence from the Christian faith. This book discusses seven key questions Gen Z is asking about life and faith and explores the generational context around each question. There is thoughtful engagement with each question through Scripture and Gen Z's questions are connected to eight features of a disciple. This book provides a process for contextualization in evangelism and discipleship for Gen Z.

ADAM KEEHN
FOUNDATION

How to Build Meaningful Relationships with Gen Z and Gen Alpha



"This book is filled with insights on the challenges and importance of listening and how this listening can reconnect us with the sacred. This is a timely and important book. It will go right into my syllabi."

—Andrew Root, Luther Seminary



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Breakout Presentations 4

Saturday, October 18 @ 2:45pm-3:30pm

Blue = Research Papers

Red = Professional Development

Green = Book Highlights

Salon B

Richard Griffith – Taccoa Falls College

Spiritual Formation as TBRI Practices for Late Adolescent College Students

Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) has become a growing practice for trauma and yet many of the practice/principles of TBRI are geared toward children. This paper proposes Spiritual Formation practices as a way to implement TBRI principles for older adolescents.

Salon C

Randy Jackson – First Baptist Church of Atlanta, Texas

Equipping Parents With Essential Soul Care Skills

This paper details an innovative initiative that equipped parents at First Baptist Church of Atlanta, Texas, with essential soul care skills for their children. It presents a practical model, including curriculum development and diverse instructional methods, offering valuable insights for youth ministers and educators on empowering families in spiritual formation.

Potomac

Mark Cannister – Gordon College

The Church in Decline: Fact or Fiction? A Look Behind the Headlines

Discouraging headlines concerning the state of the church have created a sense of fear that is driving church-based youth ministries to abandon the work of reaching out to adolescents beyond the walls of the church. Is this fear legitimate? Should the church abandon her outreach efforts toward youth to protect the youth within her walls? This session will explore preliminary observations to these questions through analyzing recent headlines and the research behind them.

Platte

Kevin Turner – Colorado Christian University

Dealing with Deconstruction in the Classroom

Faith deconstruction is the new reality for our Christian college students as well as in the lives of the young people we equip them to serve. This presentation defines and explores causes of deconstruction as well as presenting ministry action steps to help grow faith through times of questioning and wrestling associated with deconstruction.

Missouri

Kirk Brothers – Heritage Christian University

In Christ's Image: A Guide to Youth and Family Ministry

In Christ's Image: A Guide to Youth and Family Ministry was published in the fall of 2024 by Heritage Christian Press. It is built around the belief that discipleship is about partnering with God as he shapes people into the image of His son. This book has 60 chapters authored by 64 experienced and credentialed ministers and practitioners. Whether you work in children's ministry, teen ministry, or college and young adult ministry, there is something here for you.



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* Special thanks to our D6 Heroes (donors) whose generosity makes such resources possible.

D6 FAMILY MINISTRY

Saturday Evening Food & Fun in Des Moines

We will embark on a 10-minute walk to **BUZZARD BILLY'S** for dinner, departing the hotel lobby at 5:30. (Hotel shuttle van is available if you prefer)

Buzzard Billy's is a locally owned casual dining restaurant. We have reserved their private event room where we will enjoy a time of food and fellowship as we feast from a pasta buffet loaded with grilled chicken fettuccine, salad, and dinner rolls. There will also be plain fettuccine for vegetarians.



After dinner we will stroll down the street to **RICOCHET**, a place that is dedicated to delivering boundless fun and entertainment. We will enjoy a relaxed time of fun and fellowship in the Player's Club, while playing an extensive array of games, including billiards, darts, bumper pool, skeeball, foosball, bubble hockey, tabletop shuffleboard, corn hole, and much more! Snacks and drinks will be available for purchase at RICOCHET.



Evening Schedule

- 5:30** Leave the hotel lobby for dinner at **BUZZARD BILLY'S**, 615 3rd Street Des Moines.
10-minute walk or
hotel shuttle van.
- 7:15** Leave dinner and walk to **RICOCHET**, 400 Walnut Street Des Moines.
10-minute walk or
hotel shuttle van.
- 9:00** Leave **RICOCHET** and walk back to the Embassy Suites hotel.
10-minute walk or
hotel shuttle van.

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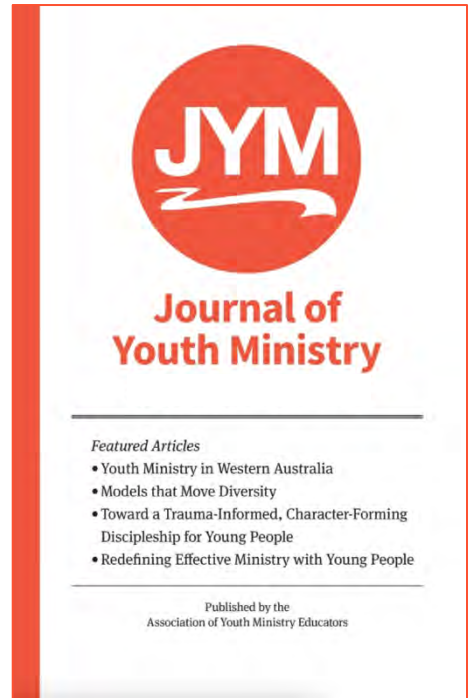
Journal of Youth Ministry

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

Dr. David Odom, Senior Editor
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

Mr. Chris Talbot, Assistant Editor
Welch College

Writer Guidelines may be found at:
www.aymeducators.org/jym

Inquiries concerning the journal may be addressed to Dr. Odom at: dodom@nobts.edu

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