



Youth Ministry Assessment Report

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Hodges Boulevard Presbyterian Church Jacksonville, Florida

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BACKGROUND

Described as “big enough to make a difference – small enough to be a family,” Hodges Boulevard Presbyterian Church is a medium-sized church in the southeastern part of Jacksonville, Florida. The church first met at the Captains Club in November of 1990 after a Bible study group from First Presbyterian Church saw the need for a church in the rapidly developing “Hodges Area” where HBPC now stands. A land grant was secured, and in February of 1991, 32 people became the charter members of the church. A formal chartering ceremony was held in September of 1992. The first building was completed in 1995, and continued growth resulted in the need for additional renovations and buildings, including the new sanctuary which was completed in 2002. Church members describe their church as “welcoming,” “warm,” “active,” “siloeed,” “tightly knit,” and “family.”

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HBPC is in a time of interim pastorate under the leadership of Rev. Dr. Cindy Benz, who became the interim the first week of September 2017. The previous called senior pastor, Dr. David Pierce, retired at the end of July 2017 after serving on staff for six years. The previous youth director also departed in the fall of 2017 to follow her calling in the local school system. A PNC (Pastor's Nominating Committee) has formed and begun to meet.

The membership of the church is around 390 and on an average week, 170 people attend one of the church's two worship services. Meeting at 9 AM is the contemporary worship service, followed by a dedicated time for Christian formation for all ages at 10 AM. A traditional worship service follows at 11 AM. During the summer months, the congregation enjoys a lighter schedule that still feeds the desire of the people to be together by meeting for one service only at 10 AM.

Currently, there are 27 6th through 12th graders on the rolls of the church. During a typical week, about nine of them participate in either Sunday school, worship or Sunday night youth group. They enjoy a yearly mission trip such as CROSS in North Carolina and Appalachian Service Project in West Virginia. A favorite fundraising event, Mystery Dinner Theater, is held annually prior to the mission trips. Youth Sunday is also a highlight as the youth eagerly anticipate sharing their lives, gifts, and talents with the larger congregation. The youth ministry is described by some youth and parents as a "fun" and "accepting" place, while others say it is a ministry that is "absent" and "lacking direction."

The church has a 2018 budget of \$710,500, of which \$50,604 is dedicated to the youth ministry. This includes the program budget as well as the salary and benefits for a youth director, a position which is currently open.

The ministry is currently led by Debbie Abbott, Director of Faith Formation, who has held this position since 2003. There are about 4 adult volunteers involved each week in one of the regular youth programs. A few others help out at special events or behind the scenes throughout the year.

Sunday night youth group meets in the fellowship hall, a multi-purpose space known for its abundant natural light from over a dozen glass doors and windows. During the 10:00 Christian formation time, middle schoolers meet in a classroom utilized by the preschool during the week, and high schoolers meet in a small room to the side of the sanctuary. This high school space, along with other portions of the building, suffered water damage from hurricane Irma in 2017. While it waits for full repair, the room has become a holding place for myriad odds and ends. There are hints toward the roots of this space in the painted ceiling tiles, personalized by the youth, and mock magazine covers featuring the faces of the youth.

After the youth director stepped away last fall, a search committee was quickly formed to help seek the next youth director. Despite the best efforts of the search committee, there

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were few applicants and even fewer viable candidates for the position. In the meantime, a few dedicated parents stepped in to keep the youth programming running. The director of formation supported them as much as possible, but regular programming, special events, and mission opportunities have all struggled and now have all but disappeared.

Ministry Architects was invited to do an initial assessment of the youth ministry and to make recommendations about how it might move strategically forward. Ministry Architects met with 37 individuals in nine focus groups or one-on-one meetings. What follows are the findings gleaned from those conversations along with recommendations and a proposed timeline for the future.

YOUTH MINISTRY IN CONTEXT

One lens Ministry Architects likes to use for understanding youth ministry is the idea of the “three rents.” Youth ministries that “pay these rents” tend to have much greater freedom to be creative, take risks, and experiment with innovative ideas. Those youth ministries that fail to pay these rents often find themselves mired in distrust, second-guessing, and discouragement.

It has been Ministry Architects’ experience that though these three rents, in and of themselves, do not ensure an effective or faithful ministry, they are often the most immediate evaluation tools used by youth, parents, staff, and the congregation at large.

Rent #1: NUMBERS - A significant percentage of youth need to be participating visibly in some aspect of the church’s ministry. It is important for this target number to be clearly agreed on by the church leaders and the staff. Ironically, when target numbers are not established, the youth ministry is typically more likely to be judged by numbers than if the target numbers are clearly established.

The consensus is that this rent is being partially paid. While some mentioned the same target number of around 15-20 youth, others suggested the target number should be closer to 50.

Rent #2: PROGRAMS - In order to “earn the right” to experiment with changes, the youth leadership needs to provide the church with a few visible, effective youth programs that give both youth and parents “something to talk about.”

This rent appears to remain unpaid. Though there have been many strong programs and events in the past, the consensus now is that there are no consistent opportunities for the youth.

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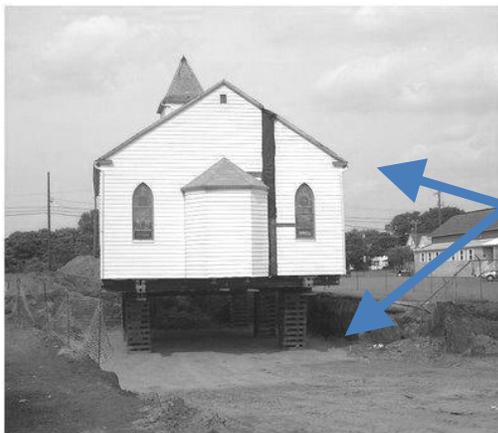
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Rent #3: ENTHUSIASM - The joyful enthusiasm and positive attitude of the youth staff, volunteers, and the youth themselves are essential to building trust with the leadership of the church and with the parents.

Multiple anecdotes about cancelled events combined with currents of frustration and doubt from volunteers suggest that this rent is not being paid on time, though the youth expressed a deep bond with each other as well as a desire to spend time together.

As the leadership of the youth ministry develops its long-range vision, it will need, at the same time, to be attentive to these “three rents.” In this sense, the youth ministry faces parallel challenges.

Ministry Architects pictures the parallel challenge this way:



Laying the Foundation:

Building a foundation and infrastructure that will ensure the youth ministry’s *future* effectiveness, and at the same time,

Continuing to Do

Ministry: Maintaining the *current* youth ministry in a way that builds the enthusiasm of youth, their families, the staff and the church at large.

As the youth ministry leadership steps into this parallel process, five rules of thumb – “youth ministry norms” – will be helpful to keep in mind. These are not necessarily targets for success; they are simply what an average church typically experiences:

1) 10% of the Worshipping Congregation - In a typical church, the size of the youth ministry tends to settle at a number that is around 10% of the worshipping congregation. A church with an average worship attendance of 170 could expect an average weekly attendance of around 17 youth per week. The current weekly attendance of 9 youth is below what could normally be expected from the ministry.

2) 20% Ceiling - Ministry Architects has also discovered that in many churches, the youth ministry has difficulty growing beyond a level that equals 20% of the weekly worshipping congregation. Very few youth ministries seem to be able to break beyond this

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20% level. HBPC might keep in mind, then, that the expected ceiling for this youth ministry is around 34 youth. The road to that level of participation is dependent on increased staffing, volunteers and budget.

3) \$1,000 per Youth - With a budget of \$50,604 (including program budget, staff salaries, and benefits) dedicated to the youth ministry, HBPC has the capacity to effectively reach and maintain a weekly participation level of somewhere in the neighborhood of 50 youth in some aspect of the church's life. With 9 currently participating every week, the ministry is well-funded for continued growth.

4) 1 Full-Time Staff Person for Every 50 Youth - Considering the position giving time to the youth ministry when fully staffed, including a part-time youth director, HBPC has the equivalent of 0.5 full time staff person. According to this rule of thumb, HBPC has the capacity to sustain the engagement of about 25 youth on a weekly basis. The current staff configuration allows room for significant numerical growth.

5) 1 Adult for Every 5 Youth - Ministry Architects likes to think in terms of "spans of care," recognizing that, realistically, most volunteers cannot effectively oversee the church's Christian nurture of more than about five youth on an ongoing basis. With 4 volunteers committed to the ministry, HBPC is currently at a ratio of 1 adult leader to every 2 youth, and provides the ministry with a capacity to support 20 youth weekly. This ministry is well-supported by volunteers and poised for sustained growth in the future.

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE STAFF

When a ministry is based solely on the giftedness of a single staff person, instability is a predictable result. Ministry Architects has found that the most stable approach to staffing a ministry, particularly in the early stages of a rebuild, is to build a staff of three *different* kinds of people:

- **The Architect:** A person or organization that designs the building plan and ensures that building is done in compliance with the agreed-upon plan.
- **The General Contractor:** A person or team who manages the flow and sequencing of work, manages the building process according to the agreed-upon blueprint, and ensures that the appropriate number of "laborers" is in place for each stage of the project.
- **The Laborers:** Those people charged with specific gifts and responsibilities for particular aspects of the work. In youth ministry, a laborer might have particular skills in relating to youth, in planning and managing events, or in teaching.

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Each of these roles is important as HBPC pursues a more sustainable model of youth ministry. As the church moves forward, the following observations will be helpful to keep in mind:

- In many churches, there is no person or group playing the role of the architect. The ministry simply moves from one event to the next without a clear vision or stated outcomes. With the youth director position vacant and no clear leadership team for the youth, HBPC is in need of an architect.
- The staff is often expected to serve in all three of these roles. This is a recipe for congregational dissatisfaction and staff burnout.
- In the past, HBPC has hired a laborer who is skilled at leading singing, playing games or teaching a Bible lesson. These laborers often mature into an architect or a general contractor, but only if they are given permission, time, and training.

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ASSETS

Strengths to protect in the current youth ministry

Small But Mighty

There are times that a smaller church is not seen by the members, youth, and parents as a positive thing. That is not the story here at HBPC. Instead, the size of the congregation is embraced and cherished like a beloved pair of mittens. One youth proclaimed, "I don't want this to be a big church! I like how we all know each other." The phrases "family," "tight-knit," and "unified" were used by parents, members, and youth to describe the results of being a church with fewer numbers. With a plethora of "mega-churches down the street," as one youth described it, there is not an overall feeling of a need to compete. Instead, there is a steady acceptance of the size of this congregation.

Deep Pockets

The willingness of a church to contribute financially to the youth ministry is a profound reflection on their true support. While finances are not the *only* way the youth ministry needs to be supported, it does indicate a desire for success. The people of HBPC were described as "tremendously generous" by one member, and others shared the existence of a perpetual family fund that has monies available to offset the costs of anything youth related. Even fundraisers held by the youth resulted in "the fellowship hall full to the walls," as one person described it. There is clearly an acceptance at HBPC that a well-funded ministry, even outside of the church budget, is imperative.

It Takes A Village

Youth, volunteers, clergy, and parents at HBPC are able to articulate their deep conviction that spiritual formation is best accomplished when the family and church work together. One parent shared, "I need other people to say things to my child that they won't listen to from me." There are ongoing mentor/mentee relationships from an initiative several years ago that one participant still describes as "bringing me great joy." There is not the sense from the parents that it's the church's job to provide one hundred percent of spiritual formation for their children, and at the same time the church members do not give the impression that the responsibility is totally in the parents' hands. A volunteer emphatically reminded the rest of the room, "we took a baptismal vow!" Clearly, the weight and importance of the spiritual formation of the youth is felt by all.

Heart For Missions

Without fail, when youth were asked about their favorite part of the ministry at HBPC, the answer was tied to a mission opportunity. From a recent summer trip with CROSS in North Carolina with the middle schoolers to an overseas visit to Puerto Rico several years back, the youth could not stop talking about their love for missions. One member,

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who began attending HBPC at age two and is now a mother herself, fondly recounted an Appalachian Service Project trip that she described as “really impactful.” A volunteer remembered chaperoning a trip to Chicago where the youth performed musically and “rocked the house.” Several youths regularly participate in Beaches Habitat on the 3rd Monday of each month, and a repeated favorite was Hunger Fight from a few years ago. One parent wisely noted, “Our kids are not shying away from people who are not like them,” while a youth expressed their love for the fact that “we actually DO something for people.”

Open Arms and Hearts

One word that was heard over and over during the listening groups was the word “welcoming.” The church, as a whole, prides itself in being known as “welcoming and friendly,” as one session member described it. One youth established, “I feel accepted by the older generation,” and the consensus among all the youth was that everyone is friendly. The youth are very close, and they depend on each other even though they attend a variety of public schools. They carry each other’s burdens and support each other, enabling one youth to share, “They accept me for who I am.” They have a sincere desire to include everyone, and the high schoolers even admitted they enjoy spending time with the younger middle schoolers, though time apart is also treasured.

Diversity of Thought

Many churches struggle with accepting that youth may struggle with their faith and even opinions about God and the world. HBPC is not one of those churches. The importance of this church and this youth ministry being a safe place for exploring thoughts and beliefs is paramount here. Even when there is not agreement on a specific subject, the focus is on being “open,” as one person shared. A parent noted, “It *has* to be a place where they can speak about their challenges, questions, about their faith or lack thereof.” Another parent shared, “They are discovering their voice: who I am, and what is important to me.” Opportunities for the youth to express their doubts and questions have been created in this safe place.

Up and Coming Enthusiasts

Despite the acknowledged struggles of the youth ministry, there is still a general enthusiasm and excitement among the youth. This, combined with the stories of fun, exciting, and meaningful programming from the recent past, has resulted in a group of rising 4th and 5th graders expressing a desire to be a part of the youth ministry when their time comes. One parent shared, “My son can’t wait until it’s his turn.” With nine children slated to begin their youth journey over the next 3 years, continuing the enthusiasm and celebration of this ministry will likely result in a significant increase of future youth.

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Clarity of Need

In the listening groups, there was an across-the-board consensus that the youth ministry is not all that the youth, the parents, the volunteers, and the staff would like it to be. HBPC has experienced past seasons of great things in the youth ministry, and there is still a faint fragrance of it floating throughout the congregation. With a vacant youth director position and programming that one youth described as “slowed down to nothing,” it is clear that there is a desire for a return to a more stable youth ministry. One parent shared, “I want my kid to wake ME up and drag ME to church.” Another stated, “I want my kids to have that *all-in* kind of feeling.” Though there is discouragement with the current state of the ministry, one member expressed, “I don’t think the youth group is completely broken, I think it may just be bent.”

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CHALLENGES

Obstacles to moving the youth ministry strategically forward

Savior Complex

Listening group participants seemed to assume that simply hiring the right staff person would be the solution to its youth ministry challenges. Repeatedly, the hope was expressed that “if we can just find the right person,” the youth ministry will thrive. There was even some expressed panic as one person shared, “If we don’t find a youth leader in a reasonable amount of time, what is going to happen?!” But an obsessive focus on staff will not likely empower those staff people to be effective. Apart from the development of a long-term infrastructure and a clear design for future effectiveness, the hiring of the new youth director will not be the silver bullet that some parents and youth hope they will be.

Volunteer Match.com

An interesting paradox about the youth ministry at HBPC came to light in relationship to the volunteer and leader needs. There appears to be a good number of adults who have the desire to lead the youth but haven’t yet found themselves in a leadership role where they felt very effective. There were also a number of parents that expressed a desire to help and one admitted, “In the back of my mind, I was just waiting to be asked.” There are likely several reasons this is happening:

- There are not well-communicated roles for them to step into.
- There are not clearly defined avenues to step into a leadership role.
- Volunteers have not been matched to the role that is best for their natural gifts.
- Volunteers have not been properly trained.

While there is some frustration around the lack of successful volunteer structure, the desire and willingness are present and just need to be properly harnessed.

High Turnover is Causing Deep Scars

Throughout the listening groups, there was a consensus that the church had experienced a high rate of turnover in their youth directors. In that past twelve years, there have been at least seven different people who led the ministry, with various other congregants and staff members stepping in to fill the gap during the time of interim. One youth described the pain of this process by describing a wound saying, “It’s starting to heal because we got stitches, but then someone comes along and rips the stitches out and reopens the wound. Every time a youth director leaves, it’s like having our stitches ripped out over and over again.” Ultimately the youth are longing for dependable, long-lasting relationships, and the turnover rate is emphasizing their lack of connections with adult members of the church.

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Lack of Rhythm and Predictability

The youth of HBPC love each other and want to spend time with one another but are still struggling to find times to connect because the program offerings are unpredictable. One parent said that the youth consistently text each other on the day of a gathering asking, “Are we are going to have a meeting tonight? Who’s going come?” Parents shared, “It is hard to prioritize something if you don’t know it’s coming,” and, “It’s really frustrating when there is no guarantee that youth group will actually happen.” If HBPC is going to harness the enthusiasm of their youth to be together, it will require a schedule that has a predictable annual and weekly schedule.

Unreliable Communication

In the listening groups, mixed responses about how youth and parents receive information regarding upcoming gatherings were expressed. Some parents seemed to know how to piece together their resources and find the desired information, but others were lost! One parent was quick to respond to questions about communication by claiming, “I don’t have a clue what’s going on! Communication has been one of our weakest points.” Another parent expressed frustration saying, “There’s not a webpage or digital resource that we can check for current information.” While there is information that is sent out to church members, it’s not always reaching its intended recipient. Until a reliable communication system is in place, it will be difficult for the youth ministry program at HBPC to grow.

Burning Gas

There is an agreement among staff, youth, and parents that HBPC should be “big enough to make a difference, but small enough to be a family,” but there isn’t a clear picture of what they envision the youth ministry to look like. While there have been some fun activities and various successes in recent years, the direction of the youth ministry program has been largely dependent upon the passions and talents of whatever individual was leading the program at the time. One parent explained, “The kids are detached because there isn’t a viable program and they bounce around from director to director.” Still, another said, “The high schoolers like each other and want to be here, but don’t like what they are doing.” One parent held back tears as she said, “The youth program is super, super important for me. It’s sort of a deal breaker. If there isn’t something here for him, then we have to go.” Leaving the vision of the ministry in the hands of the director will result in an ever-changing vision that cannot guarantee a consistently desired or effective program. A ministry without a vision is like taking a road trip without a stated destination; you can drive around and burn up gas, but there is no assurance you will be happy with where you end up. In order for HBPC to have consistently desired outcomes, they will need to develop a vision that exists outside of a youth director.

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“We’re still here, we swear.”

One thing that no one can argue about is that the youth of HBPC are wonderful, caring, talented, and clever people! Unfortunately, their amazing qualities are not being celebrated or witnessed among the entire congregation. Several of the youth expressed a sadness of feeling forgotten and saying, “We’re still here, we swear,” and, “Our only visibility is at the bake sale.” While there are some instances where the youth are celebrated, such as Youth Sunday, the overall feeling from the youth themselves was that they are invisible to the rest of the church.

Lack of Formation Plan

The parents in the listening sessions had hopes for their children’s spiritual growth at HBPC:

- “They are the beneficiaries of grace.”
- “They need to have a sense of what their faith is.”
- “The firm belief that God loves me no matter than what I do.”
- “They are loved and accepted for who they are.”

However, while the youth knew they were loved and welcomed at HPBC, few demonstrated a fluency speaking of their own faith and convictions. When asked about Confirmation, there was some confusion about when it is offered and seemed to be an overall ambiguity regarding its importance in the youth’s spiritual growth journey. The desire of the parents is simply not being met and some intentional work will need to be done in creating a formation plan if the graduating youth are going to be launched out into the world with the knowledge that their parents desire for them.

Intergenerational Silos

One of the things that is wonderfully unique about HBPC is that there was a desire among every listening group to be more connected to people of different generations. One person even described their dream for the youth by saying, “I would love to see youth be around and intertwined throughout the church.” The unfortunate part is that most people also agreed that, “they are isolated in age groups,” and “exist in their own silos,” giving them little chance for meaningful interaction. What connections have been made have been positive, as one woman described her relationship with a youth, “I’m her mentor... well, I’m not really mentoring her, she’s mentoring me.” On the other, more frustrating side of that was the woman that said, “Outside of the church I like to kayak and horseback ride and stuff like that and I’d like to invite the youth, but I don’t know what the parameters are.” There is clearly a deep longing for intergenerational connections, but the congregation needs some guidance on how to blend their groups and enjoy meaningful times of fellowship and formation.

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Lack of Discipleship Options for Parents

Sometimes when churches are looking for solutions for youth ministry, they will find that, because no ministry exists inside a vacuum, there are other factors outside of the youth department that are hindering growth. One of the elements uncovered at HBPC is that there are not desirable discipleship options for parents during the times when their youth would be in their own programming. While there have been times when there were offerings that met the needs of the parents, the general consensus was that the current offerings were falling flat. In fact, “I don’t have anything here anymore,” was the sentiment heard from one parent as she described her discipleship options at HBPC. Another voiced her desire by saying, “Look at what Sunday school could do for you! You need your soul fed just as much as the kids!” Creating discipleship options, specifically during the times when youth are also enjoying discipleship, is critical in getting the youth to participate!

No Man Is An Island

As one parent noted, “Big isn’t always better, but small can be bad when everything is reliant on one person.” This sentiment is particularly true when no one feels like they have the authority or are equipped to step in to fill a gap. While there are a handful of volunteers in place, there is not a feeling among parents and volunteers that they can jump into action when a leader is unavailable at the last minute. More than once, stakeholders talked about times when there were youth Sunday school classes that were canceled because the leader couldn’t be there, leaving the youth to “wander the halls,” as one parent described it.

Irma Aftermath

The location and size of the youth room at HBPC is a good match to the needs of the program. However, ever since Hurricane Irma blew through last year, the space has been needing some major TLC. Not only are there a variety of items in the room that should instead be stored in a shed or closet, there is also a significant leak that is making the space feel anything but welcoming. There isn’t a problem with meeting in what was intended as to be a storage space, as long as it doesn’t feel like one! As one parent indicated, “The church needs a space for youth that is dry, comfortable, accessible, and designated as theirs.”

Counting Your Sheep

One of the greatest challenges throughout the assessment process was determining the number of youths on the rosters, as well as the number of youths that are actually in attendance for various gatherings. Simply put, attendance is not being taken with any consistency. When this becomes the norm and churches aren’t regularly “counting their sheep,” they can easily forget to follow up with a youth when they haven’t been seen in several weeks. When asked what happens when a youth stops attending Sunday school or youth group, one parent explained, “Someone may say they’ve missed you when you

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pass in the hall, but nothing really happens.” In other words, there is no official plan for keeping track of the youth, or for inviting them back into the fold when they have wandered off.

Lack of Critical Mass

The number one thing that attracts kids is other kids. Both the youth and the adults voiced concern over the small number of youths who participate in Sunday school and youth group. Some even said that there were times when activities were canceled last-minute because so few people were available to attend. When bringing a friend, one youth shared, “She was put on the spot and uncomfortable because there were so few youth.” Furthermore, there is a similar desire from parents, too. One parent said, “We need to draw in more youth so that there is some diversity and kids can figure out where they fit.” A critical mass of youth tends to create a climate of enthusiasm, parental support, and congregational excitement.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Reframe the next 36 months as a time of building long-term infrastructure for the youth ministry. Understanding that significant and immediate momentum will be built throughout the process of renovating the youth ministry, target September 2021 as the date when the youth ministry renovation will be complete.
2. Establish a Prayer Team to undergird this renovation process.
3. Present this report to the Session, requesting that they endorse a 36-month strategic design process for the youth ministry.
4. Establish a Youth Ministry Renovation Team, made up of at least three non-anxious, goal-oriented volunteers and, until the new Youth Director is in place, the Director of Formation who will work closely with Ministry Architects to ensure that the outcomes of this assessment are achieved. These recommendations include two overarching responsibilities:
 - I. **Addressing the immediate pressure points** facing the ministry as it transitions toward a thriving, sustainable youth ministry (e.g., keeping the trains running on time).
 - II. **Implementing the strategic, long-term** recommendations of this report (e.g., building a new railway system).
5. Partner with Ministry Architects to take responsibility for
 - I. Managing the renovation process, working with the staff and volunteers to ensure the achievement of the outcomes outlined in this report's timeline.
 - II. Assisting the youth ministry in overcoming the obstacles that are certain to arise in the process of renovating the youth ministry.
 - III. Assisting the Renovation Team and HR Committee with the search process to fill the youth director position.
6. Address the current pressure points facing the youth ministry:

Pressure Point #1: Build the Team – Recruit and train volunteers to ensure that all bases are covered through the end of December 2018.

- Develop a schedule of offerings for the youth that will address their needs for discipleship and formation opportunities, paying close attention to days and times that the youth are most available. The full set of offerings should include times for both the middle and high school to be together, as well as times for them to be separate.
- Make a list of immediate volunteer positions that need to be filled.
- Ensure clear, results-based job descriptions have been created for every volunteer position.

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- Using the church directory, create a list of potential volunteers and begin calling them personally, inviting them to participate in specific roles on the youth ministry team.
- Schedule and implement an inspiring leadership-training event for all volunteer youth workers in September of 2018. At the leadership training, volunteers will complete the Safe Sanctuaries training and be equipped with tips for leading youth, an overview of the curriculum, rosters, and communication plans.

Pressure Point #2: Calendar Communication Plan – Create a youth calendar through December 2018 that:

- Includes Sunday school, youth group, and fellowship opportunities.
- Has been shared with families on the website, through email, in the newsletter, and in print at Rally Day.
- Is supplemented by weekly calendar updates that have been emailed, updated on the website, and sent by text to families.

Pressure Point #3: Shift the Culture: Celebrate the work and ministry of the youth as it relates to the church without the lead of a paid youth director, shifting our hope towards who we are instead of what we have lost. Consider including the following options for sharing these celebrations:

- Telling stories on the bulletin boards in the church hallways
- Sharing stories through articles in the newsletter
- Ask a youth to share a meaningful experience in church during worship

7. Build the long-term infrastructure required for a long-term, sustainable youth ministry.

- **Host a “Quick Start” Summit:** Invite the Renovation Team, key volunteers, and youth staff to participate in a Quick Start Summit in which the renovation process is launched and the pressure points outlined in the Assessment Report are addressed. The Summit tackles the items that need to be done first and builds momentum for the youth ministry renovation process.
 - Identify any progress in implementing the recommendations of this report.
 - Orient the Renovation Team to their specific responsibilities.
 - Assign Renovation Team members responsibility for implementing the recommendations of the report.
 - Calendar the dates involving Renovation Team.
 - Create a plan for concrete communication between the Renovation Team and staff to ensure that all parties feel they’re “in the know.”

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- Draft or edit the following documents, finalizing them within no more than two weeks after the Quick Start Summit:
 - A finalized version of the calendar for all weekly programs and major special events through December 2018.
 - Results-based, written job descriptions for all paid and volunteer positions in the youth ministry. The job descriptions cover all current positions and also include additional, non-threatening opportunities for adult involvement in both visible and behind-the-scenes opportunities.
 - A clear and complete list of volunteer needs in the youth ministry, including relational and behind-the-scenes, weekly events and special event leaders.
 - A broad “fishing pond” list of at least 30 possible volunteers to call about volunteer positions. The list includes people we are sure will say yes, and it includes people we think will never say yes (but we hope they will one day).
 - Reasonable participation goals have been established for all youth ministry events and weekly programs through December 2018 and clear lines of responsibility for filling those events have been established.

- **Visioning:** Invite parents and leaders to participate in a multi-session, on-campus process of visioning a new future for the youth ministry with Ministry Architects, resulting in the following documents which will direct the ministry:
 - A ministry mission statement
 - A statement of values
 - A set of three-year revolving goals and one-year benchmarks
 - An organizational structure for the ministry

- **Christian Formation Summit:** Gather a team for a Christian Formation Summit to discuss the learning objectives of each age level and how these might be accomplished utilizing curriculum, milestones and special programming.
 - Evaluate the upcoming curriculum to ensure its effectiveness.
 - Develop a long-range scope and sequence as well as a set of core competencies for the youth ministry programming.
 - Develop a clear plan for milestones and special events to shape the faith formation through the ages and stages.
 - Determine how the curriculum selected will be communicated to volunteers.
 - Decide what level of training will be required prior to full implementation.

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- **Control Document Development:** Complete and publish an 18-month calendar, create major event notebooks to help event planners succeed, and generate a preventative maintenance calendar that schedules behind-the-scenes activities for each month (like “September: nail down the date for next year’s high school mission trip”).
- **Compliance Documents:** Ensure that copyright licensing for music and videos has been obtained, an application and screening process for every volunteer is in place, and all adults working with any youth affirm a sexual abuse/child protection policy.
- **Attendance:** Track attendance for all youth activities and develop an attendance system that allows for easy access to weekly participation numbers.
- **Marketing:** Establish clear internal marketing processes that allow parents, youth, leaders, and the broader church to be exposed to the successes and good news surrounding the youth ministry.
- **Youth Ministry Manual:** Develop a Youth Ministry Manual, including the most recent youth directory, a 12-18-Month calendar, results-based job descriptions for staff and volunteers, compliance documents, budgets, game plans, a preventative maintenance calendar, and notes for every major youth ministry event.
- **Fall Kick-Off/Parent Orientation:** Develop an intentional, family-based, incredibly fun Fall Kickoff event to launch the youth ministry in the fall of 2019. Use that event to cast the vision, share information, and build enthusiasm about the year ahead.

DEVELOPING AND NURTURING STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

- **Strategic Staffing:** Propose a clear, appropriate long-term staffing plan, including the professional and volunteer components, for the youth ministry that will provide the church with significant capacity to sustain a thriving ministry to its targeted number of youth.
- **Leadership Development:** Reevaluate the results-based, job descriptions for all paid and volunteer positions in the youth ministry and create a structure for the ongoing training of all volunteers at least quarterly.

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- **Volunteer Recruitment System:** Review your list of volunteer needs, ensuring that you have included individuals that will do relational ministry with youth while others work behind the scenes. Create a clear and complete list of the volunteer needs as they have evolved since the start of the Renovation Process. Create a “fishing pond” list of at least 30 possible volunteers to call on for weekly volunteer positions.
- **Staff Development:** Provide mechanisms for on-going education and coaching for the youth ministry staff including coaching, reading and seminars.

DEVELOPING CLEAR STRATEGIES AND NEW INITIATIVES

- **Integration:** Develop a strategic plan for helping the youth become an integral part of the whole church, weaving the youth ministry into the fabric of the entire church.
- **Facilities:** Explore the options for addressing the required repairs and clean-up of the youth room to better serve the youth of HBPC. Propose options to the Session for revision or approval.
- **Intergenerational Ministry:** Plan two or three intergenerational events throughout the year focused on building relationships with all members of the church and fun fellowship.
- **Confirmation:** Develop a strengthened Confirmation plan with the assistance of the clergy and input from a key group of parents. Determine the duration of the program, what age it is to take place, etc.
- **Parent Formation:** Explore options with a group of parents and the church staff to identify desired materials for the Sunday morning offerings for parents with children still living at home.
- **Rites of Passage (or Milestones):** Develop a written plan for the processes, events, and privileges that will:
 - Welcome and connect the new 6th graders and their parents into the youth ministry.
 - Welcome and connect the new 9th graders and their parents into the high school ministry.
 - Launch the church’s high school graduates from the youth ministry, confident that they are surrounded by a supporting church family and committed to live out their faith as adults.

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PROPOSED TIMELINE

The following provides Hodges Boulevard Presbyterian Church with a timeline that can serve as a blueprint for the strategic launch of sustainable, long-term youth ministry.

September 2018

Focus: Starting Right and Work Begins

Outcomes:

- This report has been presented to the Session for the strategic renovation of the youth ministry and the Session has given full support of this plan.
- A Quick Start Summit has been scheduled for October.
- The Renovation Team for youth has been recruited and the first meeting has been scheduled to take place during the Quick Start Summit.
- A prayer team has been recruited and charged with praying for the youth ministry. They have received a copy of the assessment report and timeline.
- The church has partnered with Ministry Architects to serve as the architect for the entire renovation process.
- Pressure Point 1 has been addressed: The Team has been Built:
 - A schedule of offerings for the youth that will address their needs for discipleship and formation opportunities, paying close attention to days and times that the youth are most available has been developed. The full set of offerings has included times for both the middle and high school to be together, as well as times for them to be separate.
 - The immediate volunteer needs have been identified and the positions have been filled.
 - Results-based job descriptions have been written and distributed to the appropriate volunteers for the youth ministry.
 - An inspiring leadership-training event for all volunteer youth workers has taken place. Volunteers have completed the Safe Sanctuaries training and have been equipped with tips for leading youth, an overview of the curriculum, rosters, and communication plans.
- Pressure Point #2 has been addressed: A Calendar Communication Plan has been implemented. A Youth calendar has been created through December 2018

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that:

- Includes Sunday school, youth group, and fellowship opportunities
 - Has been shared with families on the website, through email, in the newsletter, and in print at Rally Day.
 - Weekly calendar updates have been emailed, updated on the website, and texted to families.
- Mechanisms for on-going education and coaching for the youth ministry staff and key volunteers have been provided.

October 2018

Focus: Renovation Underway, Quick Start Summit, Visioning, Budget

Outcomes:

- A Visioning Summit has been scheduled for February and a “save the date” email/postcard has been sent to all families.
- A Quick Start Summit has taken place in which the renovation process was launched, and pressure points outlined in the Assessment Report have been addressed. The Summit tackled the items that needed to be done first to initiate the youth ministry renovation process.
- Pressure Point #3 has been addressed: Youth have been celebrated, and the culture is shifting.
- Work on the search for the next Youth Director has begun. A Strategic Staffing plan has been proposed to address the short and long-term staffing plan needs of the youth ministry. The Youth Search Committee has begun their work in collaboration with the Ministry Architect search specialist.
- A short-term team has met with the appropriate church committees to explore the options in addressing the required repairs and clean up youth room to better serve the youth of HBPC. Proposed options have been sent to the Session for revision or approval.
- All pressure points have been addressed.

November 2018

Focus: Database, Visioning Promotion, Volunteers

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Outcomes:

A detailed 2019 budget for the youth ministry has been completed and submitted to the appropriate group.

- Work on the youth database has begun, collecting the most recent information for families and youth. All are categorized in a manner that will follow up on MIA families and youth. Each youth has been classified in the following categories:
 - Active youth** are the ones whose families are members and have attended at least once in the past year – plus visitors who have become a regular part of the group. They should show up in your printed youth ministry directory.
 - Member Inactive (MIA)** are still a part of the flock. You may not need to send them a Facebook message every time the group gets together, but you'll want to regularly pursue these youth, whether they ever show up or not.
 - Visitor Active** are those who regularly attend weekly programs and/or activities but are not an official member of the church.
 - Visitor Inactive** are the ones who may have visited, but you are confident they will never become a regular part of the group. This group requires no follow up. But you'll want to keep their information for the occasional big event to which you'll want to invite everyone you know.
 - First Timers** refer to visitors who have attended a program for the first time. You'll want to have a process for capturing their information on their first visit and follow up with them within one week of their visit.
- Continued collaboration between the Youth Search Committee and the Ministry Architects search specialist has continued.

December 2018**Focus: Pressure Points, Communication, Calendar, Visioning Promotion****Outcomes:**

- The 2018-2019 youth ministry calendar has been completed and distributed.
- Work has begun on the summer calendar for 2019.
- Communication norms have been determined and those best practices are being implemented.

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- Continued collaboration between the Youth Search Committee and the Ministry Architects search specialist has continued.
- Promotion of the Visioning Summit has begun.

January 2019

Focus: Visioning, Summer Calendar, Compliance

Outcomes:

- A volunteer application, an application process and a screening process for all weekly hands-on volunteers have been created and implemented.
- Background checks have been done for all weekly hands-on volunteers.
- All paperwork for hands on, weekly volunteers has been updated and is in compliance with the Safe Sanctuaries policy.
- All programs have adhered to the Safe Sanctuaries policy as laid out by the church
- Copyright licensing for music and videos has been obtained. Permission slips for each offsite event in addition to standard medical release forms for the entire year have been created.
- Work has begun on the 2019-2020 youth ministry calendar.
- The summer 2019 calendar for the youth ministry has been completed and distributed.
- Continued collaboration between the Youth Search Committee and the Ministry Architects search specialist has continued.

February 2019

Focus: Visioning, Volunteer Training, Recruitment, Calendar, Mid-Course Evaluation

Outcomes:

- Volunteer recruiting season has opened.
 - Volunteer job descriptions have been reviewed and updated as needed.

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- Names of potential volunteers have been added to the fishing pond.
 - All volunteer needs have been determined for the 2019-2020 school year.
 - The volunteer needs list and the potential volunteers list has been merged.
 - Current volunteers have been asked to evaluate and possibly renew their commitment to the youth ministry.
 - Recruitment has begun for hands-on weekly volunteers, event coordinators and behind-the-scenes volunteers for 2019-2020
- The Renovation Team has met monthly and decided how often they will meet for the remainder of the next 11 months.
 - The 2019-2020 youth ministry calendar has been completed through August 2020 including a Fall Kick-off.
 - Continuing education opportunities have been explored and calendared for the youth ministry staff.
 - A Visioning Summit with all major stakeholders has occurred producing visioning documents for the youth ministry (mission statement, core values, goals and structure).
 - One-year benchmarks have been assigned to each three-year, revolving goal developed in the visioning process.
 - Continued collaboration between the Youth Search Committee and the Ministry Architects search specialist has continued.

March 2019

Focus: Attendance Tracking, Christian Formation Summit, Participation Goals, Database, Volunteer Thank You

Outcomes:

- A Christian Formation Summit has been scheduled for October 2019. The Summit will facilitate a discussion of the learning objectives of each age level and how these might be accomplished utilizing available curriculum.
- A process for tracking and recording attendance in all youth ministry programs has been created and implemented.

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- Reasonable participation goals have been determined for all youth ministry events and weekly programs through August 2020 and steps to accomplish those targets have begun to be implemented.
- A database of all youth and their families has been compiled and each person is “tagged” with a category.
- Continuing education opportunities have been explored for the youth ministry staff.
- A volunteer thank you event has been scheduled for May and promotional materials have gone out to all youth volunteers.

April 2019

Focus: Major Event Notebooks, Marketing, Communication

Outcomes:

- Work has begun on major event notebooks – creating a template for the notebooks and collecting information on each youth event.
- Clear, internal marketing processes have been established that allow all church members to be exposed to the successes and good news surrounding the youth ministry.
- Communication methods currently being used to promote the youth ministry and share the successes with the congregation have been evaluated and added to if necessary.
- Volunteer recruitment has continued.
- Options have been explored with a group of parents and the church staff to identify desired materials for the Sunday morning offerings for parents with children at home.

May 2019

Focus: MIA, Volunteer Thank You, Fall Kick-off, Manual

Outcomes:

- A volunteer thank you event has taken place.

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- A Fall Kick-off team has been recruited to begin planning for the start of the fall youth ministry programs.
- MIA youth have been systematically contacted.

June 2019

Focus: Volunteers, Database

Outcomes:

- The collection of updated information from each youth and family has been completed and the database for youth ministry has been updated with that new information.
- All volunteer needs for the 2019-2020 school year for youth ministry have been filled.
- Two or three intergenerational events have been calendared for the upcoming programmatic year. They have been focused on building relationships with all members of the church and fun fellowship.

July 2019

Focus: Major Event Notebooks, Directory, Curriculum

Outcomes:

- With the most recent information on youth and their families, a directory of all families and a directory of all volunteers have been created to be distributed at the Fall Kick-off.
- All major event notebooks have been updated by the event coordinators and given back to the youth staff to pass along to the next year's coordinator.
- The effectiveness of this past year's curriculum has been reviewed and decisions have been made for any necessary changes for the upcoming school year.

August 2019

Focus: Leadership Launch, Compliance, Major Event Notebooks

Outcomes:

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- All volunteers have experienced a Leadership Launch, lasting 2-4 hours that clarified their roles, inspired them to grow in their own faith and equipped them to serve. The Safe Sanctuaries Policy was reviewed and adopted by all volunteers.
- All paperwork for hands on, weekly volunteers has been updated and is in compliance with the Safe Sanctuary policy. Background checks have been completed on each volunteer.
- All youth programs have adhered to the Safe Sanctuaries policy.
- Major event notebooks for each major event for the youth ministry have been handed out to this year's event coordinators.

September 2019

Focus: Fall Kick-off, Curriculum, Benchmarks

Outcomes:

- Curriculum has been distributed to all teachers/volunteers and they have been trained to implement the curriculum.
- A Fall Kick-off has taken place that welcomed youth and parents into a program they can get excited about, introduced parents to a format and structure they can feel confident about and provided a forum for receiving information from families. All participants feel energized and enthusiastic about the coming year's programs.
- 50% of the one-year benchmarks have been accomplished.

October 2019

Focus: Reflection and Re-Assessment, Christian Formation Summit, Budget

Outcomes:

- Interested staff, volunteers, and parents have gathered for a Christian Formation Summit to discuss the learning objectives of each age level and how these might be accomplished utilizing available curriculum, milestones, and special programming. At the Summit, the team
 - Evaluated the upcoming curriculum to ensure its effectiveness
 - Developed a long-range scope and sequence as well as a set of core competencies for the youth ministry programming.

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- Developed a clear plan for milestones and special events to shape the faith formation through the ages and stages.
 - Determined how the curriculum selected will be communicated to volunteers.
 - Decided what level of training will be required prior to full implementation.
- A detailed 2020 budget for the youth ministry has been completed and submitted to the appropriate group.
 - Current pressure points have been named.
 - A written strategic plan for helping the youth become an integral part of the whole congregation, weaving the youth ministry into the fabric of the entire church, has been created.

November 2019

Focus: Preventative Maintenance Calendar, Manuals

Outcomes:

- A preventative maintenance calendar has been created for the youth ministry that will help regularly deal with on-going “behind the scenes” ministry maintenance.
- All game plans that have been launched in last 12 months have been evaluated and tweaked as necessary for impact and sustainability.
- The youth Ministry Manuals (both hard copy and digital) have been completed, including
 - Visioning documents
 - Directories
 - Volunteer directory
 - Volunteer training agendas and notes
 - Attendance records
 - Annual calendar
 - Results-based job descriptions
 - Game plans and new initiatives
 - Meeting agendas and minutes for Renovation Team
 - Christian Formation Plan and record of curriculum resources used for the

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- current year
- Budget and other financial documents
- Recruiting template, with a record of all the volunteer needs for the year
- Compliance documents

December 2019

Focus: Calendar, Strategic Staffing

Outcomes:

- Work has begun on the summer calendar for 2020.
- With the changes in the youth ministry, the volunteer staffing to meet the size and scope of the youth ministry has been evaluated and a game plan to meet those needs has been created if necessary.
- A game plan has been developed for the Rites of Passage processes, events, and privileges that will be implemented for the 2020-2021 school year that has:
 - Welcomed and connected the new 6th graders and their parents into the youth ministry.
 - Welcomed and connected the new 9th graders and their parents into the high school ministry.
 - Launched the church's high school graduates from the youth ministry, confident that they have been surrounded by a supporting church family and committed to live out their faith as adults.

January 2020 and Beyond

Focus: Benchmarks, Calendars, Mid-Year Training

Outcomes:

- All one-year benchmarks have been achieved. Goals have been re-upped and new one-year benchmarks have been established.
- Work has begun on the 2020-2021 youth ministry calendar.
- The summer 2020 calendar for the youth ministry has been completed and distributed.
- A strengthened Confirmation plan has been developed with the assistance of the pastors and input from a key group of parents. The plan included the duration of the program, what age it is to take place, and what will be taught.

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- A mid-year training event has taken place in which all volunteers received support and training in their specific roles. A “check-in” with each volunteer has taken place to evaluate how the volunteer has been doing in their role and addressed any concerns.
- An online diagnostic has been completed to re-assess the youth ministry.
- The Renovation Team has completed a 16-month evaluation of the renovation process and made any adjustments necessary to improve the work being done. The timeline for the next 12 months has been crafted with the work of Ministry Architects.

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The *Ministry Architects* Team Serving Hodges Boulevard Presbyterian Church (Jacksonville, FL)



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Heather's passion for children's ministry, building teams, and developing volunteers keeps her energized and expectant of what God wants to do in and through people. She sees the best in people and strives to help them reach their potential in ministry and in everyday life. Heather holds a Bachelor's Degree in Nursing from Pensacola Christian College and practiced as a Registered Nurse for over 13 years before God called her into ministry. She finds herself continuing to be asked, "Can you take a look at this weird bump on my arm?" and happily applies her nursing expertise to her everyday life.



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Katie has had a passion for helping young people find their identity in Christ since she was a teenager herself, so after graduating from the University of Florida with a degree in Family, Youth, and Community Sciences, youth ministry was an obvious fit. After serving on staff at the same church for almost 14 years, Katie has come to learn that every year holds its own challenges and blessings. She adores her husband and two children, Rollins and Harlow, who keep her on her toes and full of joy.



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Mark served as the Associate Pastor for Youth and Their Families at First Presbyterian Church in Nashville, Tennessee for 28 years. Though Mark resigned his position as youth pastor in 2014, after a year away, he plans to return to First Presbyterian as a volunteer associate pastor. He is a prolific author of several youth ministry books as well as innumerable articles and reviews. Mark has trained youth workers around the world and is the fearless leader of Ministry Architects.

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