

WSFC Student Ministry

Philosophy of Ministry

Raised By Families

Scripture's emphasis for the spiritual development of young people is the family (Deut. 6:4-9; Prov. 22:6). Families reflect the image of God and are the foundational institution in society. As a result, our Student Ministry's deepest desire is to support, encourage, and equip families to be the primary spiritual guides for their teenagers.

In the New Testament, biblical authors also speak of both the global and local Church as an extension of the family (1 Tim. 3:15). Young people are told to learn from older and wiser "spiritual" mothers and fathers (1 Tim. 5:1-25; Titus 2:4). Therefore, it is also the local church's responsibility to train students in knowledge and love of the Lord and integrate them into the life of the Body. Students are part of the church family and must be embraced rather than siloed off. This is why we intentionally call ourselves a "student ministry" rather than a "youth group." We are not a separate group of young people, but rather a ministry attached to a larger body. Our mission is the same as our church: *Follow Jesus and make Him known.*

5 Guiding Values

To have a thriving ministry that pushes forward our church's mission, we believe there are five values that must uniquely guide our structural decision-making (not in any order):

1.) Missional – Our Student Ministry must exemplify and instill in students a heart for having others see, know, and follow Jesus

- We currently realize this value through offering both short and long-term mission trips, outreach opportunities and events like Sunday Night Live, curriculum lessons on evangelism topics, and emphasizing the general call of all Believers to make disciples.

2.) Relational – Our Student Ministry must foster deep relationships with God, students, leaders, parents, & pastors

- We currently realize this value through LifeGroups, Student Min Mornings, Wednesday night programming, retreats, and other events. As is true for our church, LifeGroups are at the core of our discipleship ministry. We grow in relationships when we consistently learn, serve, and "do life" with one another.

3.) Scriptural – Our Student Ministry must center around accurate interpretation and application of God's inerrant Word, not merely life-hacks or behavior modification

- We currently realize this value through the teaching of biblical exegesis and discussions about deep theological and apologetics topics. We encourage and expect students and their families to also sit under the expositional preaching of our pastors on Sunday mornings.

4.) Sustainable – Our Student Ministry must have a structural system and format that gives life to parents, students, leaders, and staff rather than one that drains and exhausts

- We currently realize this value by providing LifeGroups with Parent Coordinators and having younger grades meet at the church each week to reduce driving and encourage carpooling. Our ministry also provides leaders with teaching videos and curriculum so that they can focus on building relationships with their students rather than adding hours of planning and preparation. Finally, our ministry does not have more than one large event each month in order to reduce the logistical burden of staff and free them for more active ministry with students.

5.) Translatable – Our Student Ministry must show students a model of ministry and examples of Christlikeness that they can embrace beyond high school

- We currently realize this value through our LifeGroup structure. As students progress in age and interest, the LifeGroup model slightly changes. Younger groups meet at the church for games, snacks, and discussion. Older groups meet in homes and share meals together. This shift meets students' developmental needs, but also prepares them for ministry after high school, which is primarily home-based and organic rather than large and programmed. We also realize this value through an emphasis on Sunday morning worship with the full body of Believers. We believe that the weekly practice of church attendance will allow students to best experience the purpose of church and increase the likelihood of church attendance beyond high school.

More Answers: “Why Do You Do...?”

- **LifeGroups** – LifeGroups are the heart of discipleship at West Shore Free Church. The teenage years are often ones where students begin to think on their own and question the authority of their parents. Our Student Ministry is uniquely able to partner with parents by providing 2-3 mature adults for each LifeGroup who are able to build relationships with students and support parents' efforts in discipleship. LifeGroups are divided by grade and gender in order to deepen relationships and share life situations that are only appropriate for same-sex peers. As students progress in age and interest, the LifeGroup model slightly changes. Younger groups meet at the church for games, snacks, and discussion. Older groups meet in homes and share meals together. This shift meets

students' developmental needs, but also prepares them for ministry after high school, which is primarily home-based and organic rather than large and programmed.

- **Video Lessons** – Video lessons are created by our Student Min staff and shown during LifeGroups. Videos allow us to teach multiple groups in different settings. They also allow us to embed discussion questions so groups can pause and discuss multiple times during the lesson. This is helpful for many students who have shorter attentions spans or may forget elements from longer lessons. Video lessons also allow parents to watch the videos and discuss the content with their families.
- **Sunday Night Live (SNL)** - SNL is a monthly large group gathering at the church with food, games, live worship, and a live lesson. SNL is a place for students to experience together what it looks like to have good, godly fun. We believe God is the giver of all good things, and SNL reflects that belief to our students. In addition, SNL is a key recurring outreach event. We desire for students to bring friends – especially those who do not know Christ. This is why SNL always has a large, attractional element such as a party theme or fun game as well as a gospel-based lesson.
- **Student Min Mornings** – Student Min Mornings is a time for all students to come together to hangout, play games, eat snacks, and check in with one another from 10:15-10:40am on Sunday mornings (between services) in the gym. This is a great opportunity for new families to meet one another and get acquainted with our ministry. We encourage students to attend the main worship service with their friends and/or family at either 9 or 10:45am. If students are able and willing, we also encourage them to serve somewhere in our church body during the opposite service time.
- **Wednesday Night Programming** – Wednesday night programming is designed to address specific needs within our student body at certain times of the year. We run Student Alpha for 9 weeks during the fall to help our students become more missionally minded, encourage them to invite new friends, and teach the basics of the Christian faith. Bible studies on Wednesdays will run for 9-10 weeks right after winter and summer retreats in order to capitalize on students' revitalized faith and practice the discipline of regular Bible reading. A short Wednesday night series will run in early winter to target a specific area of confusion or struggle for our students, such as anxiety, sexuality, worldview, etc. Wednesday nights are a great opportunity for students to meet peers from other groups, have fun, and grow in their faith in addition to attending LifeGroup nights, where deeper community and discipleship takes place.
- **Special Events** – Our Student Ministry has several special events throughout the year, including short-term mission trips (local and international), retreats, etc. Each of these

events is intended to ignite or “supercharge” students’ faith by providing extended relational time, concentrated Bible teaching, or service. Special events take students out of their day-to-day routine and allow us to grow in unique and powerful ways. Although important, they are not substitutes for the daily and weekly practice of relational commitment with God, family, peers, and leaders.

- **Student Sunday School** - We believe it is essential for students to worship with the full body of Believers on Sunday mornings. Although comprehension of the sermon may vary depending on age and capability, it is the weekly practice and rhythm of attendance that will produce the best long-term benefit in a student’s life. We hope that LifeGroups will continue to be the main avenue for students to receive deep discipleship and community through an age-specific curriculum. However, if a family regularly attends a Learning Community or serves in a recurring role during the 9am service, and their student is unable or not yet ready to serve, we would love to have them attend a Bible-based study for students in grades 7-12 during that time. This study provides a need for two-service students and families while still emphasizing the importance of corporate worship with the full body of Believers.

If at any time you have questions or concerns about our ministry, please don’t hesitate to connect with Russ Allen (Next Gen Discipleship Pastor), Hannah Witter (Student Ministry Coordinator), or Quay San (Junior High Pastor).

We are praying for you and happy to support you as we, together with our students, seek to follow Jesus and make Him known!

In Christ,

The Student Min. Team