

YOUTH GROUP



BELONG BELIEVE

BECOME

BIG PICTURE GUIDE

WHY YOUTH GROUP?

Our fundamental desire as a church is to see our young people enter into a genuine, life-changing relationship with **Jesus Christ.**

This is a simple goal to understand. Far more complex are the many challenges our youth face within our modern first world context, that stand as obstacles for our young people upon their unique, individual walks with the Lord. The advent and proliferation of social media and rise of the smartphone have created a youth culture that is rooted in endless comparisons and empty affirmations, as peer acceptance and validation materialize as digital “likes” on Instagram, facebook, snapchat, and tiktok. With this need for peer approval sated through a screen, In-person interactions are gradually cheapened, as the rates of isolation amongst adolescents continually increase. Many students find themselves experiencing relationships on digital islands, rather than seeking out experiences with real people that aren’t formed by glowing pixels. They have been dubbed the “Iphone generation”, “Gen Z”, and many other monikers; but the hard truth is that our youth, isolated and exposed in the void of endless screens, are leaving our churches.

Youth Group as a program within the church functions as a bridge for these iphone wielding island dwellers, connecting youth to one another, caring mentors, and the church community as a whole. The intent of the program is to create a space where our teens can experience earnest love, genuine care, and the unconditional positive regard of Jesus Christ, through the mechanism of compassionate mentoring, peer relationships, and the transformative power of the Gospel that informs all of it.

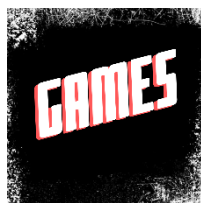
Every adolescent wants to be loved. At this youth group, our mission is that they will be, and that the love they’re shown will point them back to Jesus.

Encapsulating our mission for this program are three words: **Belong, Believe, Become**. They are not independent of one another, but rather communicate the process we adopt in seeking to realize salvation and discipleship within the lives of our young people in the youth group program. In the following three pages, I’ll breakdown exactly what we mean, and how each of these missional pillars are “lived out” within the structure of our program and youth ministry as a whole.

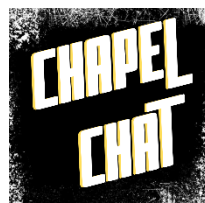
Our evening schedule:



6:00-6:30



6:30-7:00



7:00-7:20



7:20-8:00

BE LONG

Youth need to believe you care about them before they'll start to think Jesus does.
Before anything else, they need to feel that they **belong**.

HOW WE LIVE IT OUT

Within the context of our evening at youth group, every block of time is conducive to our first goal of ensuring students feel that they **belong**. Youth will first be enthusiastically greeted at the door by volunteers and directed into the vestry. Within this informal setting, students will be engaged by additional adult volunteers and other peers. Board games, snacks, and even video games on the projector screen will be available for students to play and enjoy. While this initial period of “informal hanging out” will take 20-30 minutes of our time during the evening, its placement as our first block of time is intentional, as it provides ample opportunity for students, both new and regular, to be seen, be heard, and receive the kind of affirmation and encouragement that communicates they **belong**.

Games will follow the informal hanging out and be a regular part of youth group as well, providing opportunity for students to fellowship together. Through the medium of play, even older students bond and connect with one another, and creating opportunities for relationship building as a group or “group cohesion” are important. If students feel that they are a part of the group, they will inevitably feel like they **belong**. Adult volunteers will be encouraging and empowering students within the context of the game, however silly it might be, calling students by name. While it might not seem like a tremendous act of care or concern, using a student’s name to address them, and doing so often, implies that their identity and personhood are valuable to those addressing them. To know that they are valuable enough to be remembered communicates they **belong**.

Following games will be our time in the small chapel for “chapel chat”. Students will be formally welcomed to youth group by the evening’s host, hear any important announcements, and have an opportunity for a weekly “check-in” with other adult volunteers and peers. While the check-in time is brief, it is an intentional time in which students are encouraged to share their high points and low points of the week, if they are comfortable doing so. Creating a weekly ritual like “check-in” where students can share openly communicates that those highs and lows matter, and in turn that their lives matter. When a student feels like their life matters to others, they will feel like they **belong**.

Following the evening’s message (chapel chat), students will break off into small groups based on grade and gender. A committed, regular volunteer will lead these groups, and take time to pray for students, hear their concerns, and discuss the evening’s message following a prepared list of open-ended questions for the students. Taking the time to create a space where students can feel comfortable, and sit down with someone who is consistently interested and invested in their lives (their small group leader), communicates to that student that they are worth showing up for, worth listening to, and worth praying for. When a student feels like they’re worth it, they’ll feel like they **belong**.

BELIEVE

Belief in a loving God comes when the Gospel is shared by loving people.
When a student knows they **belong**, they are far more likely to **believe**.

HOW WE LIVE IT OUT

If we are successful in achieving our first goal of ensuring our students feel that they are accepted, valued, and **belong** at youth group, we are then able to pursue our second goal that follows the first: seeing that the Gospel is spoken in love, helping students process the truth of God's Word as adults they've come to trust, and walking them through any decision they might make to follow Christ and **believe**.

While every block of time focuses on the foundational goal of ensuring students feel that they **belong**, our primary blocks of time that are tailored to focus on the Gospel are the latter two portions of the evening, being "Chapel Chat" and "Small Groups". However, everything we do structurally can also contribute to a student's comprehension and understanding of the evenings theme and message! To that end, our games will always have something to do with the theme of the night. In this way, the games will serve to provide fellowship, fun, and an active object lesson for the students to reflect on further throughout the rest of the evening. When the truth of scripture can be connected to fun experiences, students are able to broaden their understanding, better process God's Word, and come to a place in which they are ready to **believe**.

During the chapel chat block, students will hear a message spoken by Pastor Josh or another adult volunteer, centered on one portion of scripture that speaks into the evening's emphasis or theme. The message will be intentionally shorter than a traditional sermon, making use of visuals and object lessons when appropriate to engage youth even more. Making the material easy to understand, short enough to retain, and relevant enough to matter helps students process their faith and **believe**.

The small group portion of the evening will incorporate an intentional time of prayer for students, a deeper look at the scripture and message, and engage students with meaningful questions and discussion. As previously noted, the small group leaders will be running groups based on grade and gender in order to help our youth feel comfortable and at ease within the small group setting. When a student is able to articulate their concerns to a trusted adult and be prayed for, freely discuss and explore God's Word amongst their peers, and realize how much the Gospel speaks to their lives today, they are able to better understand the Gospel and **believe**.

BECOME

When students feel they **belong**, and choose to **believe**, they **become** a new Creation in Christ, continually growing, developing, and maturing in their faith.

HOW WE LIVE IT OUT

Our goal to help students “**become**” centers upon spiritual growth and discipleship in the lives of our young people. This focus on their spiritual formation empowers students as new creations in Jesus Christ, students of God’s Word, and committed disciples who seek to help other youth **belong**, **believe**, and **become**!

In order to help all our students grow spiritually within the youth group program, we want to pay special attention to where they are in their walk with the Lord, both individually and corporately as followers of Christ. Even the smallest increments of growth should be rightly affirmed and celebrated in the life of our students, as they often represent a much larger amount of thought, conviction, and belief in Christ that isn’t readily visible. As our students move closer toward Christ, even by the smallest measure, and are celebrated for these small steps of great faith, they **become** empowered and encouraged to continue walking with Jesus.

Students who have demonstrated distinct spiritual maturity will be given additional roles and responsibilities as they feel comfortable, like praying during chapel chat, helping to assist with small group discussions, and being discreetly encouraged to include other peers who might be a little shy. When spiritual maturity is recognized, affirmed, and celebrated, students are empowered to grow and **become** committed disciples of Jesus Christ and leaders in their local church.

And finally, as our students grow in Christ, our heart is that they would live like Christ. Students will be given ample opportunity to serve within our community in Holden and abroad, and be the hands and feet of Christ in a way that is powerful and tangible. They will be encouraged to engage the world around them with the love of Christ. When students are given opportunity to live out their faith, they inevitably deepen it, and **become** committed servants and passionate ambassadors of the Gospel.

Through the use of this model for our youth group and larger youth ministry, our prayer is that the Lord would see the life of every teen, every volunteer, and every person whom we have the privilege to work with changed through His love, His Gospel, and His Holy Spirit.

A WORD ON UNITS

God's Word alone is **enough**. It always will be.

In order to realize our vision of seeing our youth comprehend and engage with the Gospel, it becomes important to package it in a way they can receive, while communicating the same timeless Biblical truths. This is why each month, we will use teaching "blocks" or "units". These focused series of teaching will allow for consistency in our messages and discussion, as well as provide our youth with something to readily anticipate talking about during the month. Because our first foundational goal is to ensure our young people feel they belong, our first unit, "Worth It", will be speaking into the measureless worth of our students, and the value they have not only to one another as people, but to God as His beloved children.



WHO ARE ADULT VOLUNTEERS?

They are **called**, they are **safe**, and they are **passionate** about youth ministry!

One of the greatest priorities within any youth ministry, ours included, is the safety of our youth and families. Our adult volunteers who feel called by God to participate in the youth group program and invest in the lives our students will be vetted appropriately, and undergo continual training alongside Pastor Josh to ensure that every adult our young people engage with during the youth group program are safe, equipped, and enabled by Christ to be the best mentor they can be.

Our youth deserve nothing less.

During the youth group program, those adults who serve as volunteers will have several potential roles and be placed according to their own unique and wonderful gifting in the Lord.

Floaters will be adults who are unable to invest their time regularly, but still want to show up for our youth when they are able. Floaters will engage youth with joy and excitement, encourage youth with sincerity and care, and participate in the ministry of youth group with genuine enthusiasm. Floaters are not required to be present during the small group portion of the evening, but are welcome to do so should they feel led to.

Small Group assistants will be adults who are able to be present at youth group consistently, desire to build mentoring relationships with our young people, yet don't feel called to a larger leadership role. They will adopt all the responsibilities of floaters, while also being present in the small group discussion alongside the small group leader on a consistent basis.

Small Group leaders will be adults who are able to be present at youth group consistently, have some experience teaching young people, and who feel called to use their gifting to teach and lead the youth of our church. Small group leaders will be guiding discussion of the evening's message using provided curriculum, praying for students, and building rapport, trust, and deep, mentoring relationships with those students in their small groups. This a very important role, and we are very excited to see who the Lord will raise up to fulfil it.

Are you called? Reach out to Pastor Josh!

pastorjosh@fccholden.org

A PERSONAL NOTE FROM PASTOR JOSH

When I was 13 years old, I can remember stepping foot into the South Portland Church of the Nazarene on a cold Sunday night in September. My cheeks were flush with uneasiness, my knees quaking at the thought of having to interact with peers. For years, I had been labeled as “the chubby kid”, experiencing far more rejection than approval amongst other kids my age. That night, at this church’s youth group for the first time, I had braced myself for the emotional right hook of more names, more cruel laughter, and the familiar experience as someone nobody seemed to want.

What I found couldn’t have been more different than what I had expected.

At this youth group people were excited to meet me. They wanted to know my name. They wanted to hear about the things I really liked to do. Here, in this space, people wanted Josh. And it was the feeling of being wanted, being valued, and being cared about by others, that made my heart receptive to the Gospel. I gave my life to Jesus Christ not soon after and was a part of that youth group throughout my adolescence. Amid continual challenges at home and in school, I was surrounded by the support, care, and love of my friends and mentors at church. I knew I belonged, decided to believe, and had become a young man who found his confidence, as the person God had made him to be.

Youth group was my safe place. My Gospel place. My friend place. And it changed my life forever.

I can’t tell you enough how excited and eager I am to take this wonderful step of faith and move forward with our weekly youth group program here at the First Congregational Church of Holden. The young people in this church are brilliant, creative, kind, and incredibly unique. My inclination is that there are some who are hurting. Some who are feeling less than desirable. And some who need to be told that they are wanted, valuable, and loved.

With God helping us, we intend to do just that.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pastor Josh". The script is fluid and cursive, with the "P" being a large, sweeping capital letter.