

## Hybrid Youth Ministry - 2021

The year 2020 has forced Youth Ministry at St John's (like all our ministries!) to adapt swiftly to the fluid restrictions of the Covid-19 Pandemic. During this season we have been forced to really consider; '*what is the purpose of youth ministry?*' that we might continue to do it well online.

At the core we want our Youth Ministry to be a place where high schoolers in our community can grow in their understanding of who God is and how Jesus can shape their lives and identity. Life groups facilitate this by regularly meeting together, building trust and community as we pray, discuss the Bible, and just hang out with one-another. Occasional Friday night youth events provide an opportunity to get together as a wider youth community, to put loving like Jesus into practice in a space great for inviting mates to.

A big win in 2020 was the consistent engagement in Youth activities even as they changed to being online. Not only were we able to keep the ministry going but also experienced many blessings and benefits from the new format. While a Zoom meeting is no complete substitution for in-person meeting we believe moving forward we should learn from the good bits of online youth ministry.

Beginning 2021 we will trial a Hybrid Youth Ministry model, involving both in-person and online components.

### How will it work?

- **Youth Life Groups**  
The first week of each month YLG's will meet in-person, the rest of the month meeting online via Zoom.
- **Occasional Friday night events**  
Each term will have one in-person youth event and one online youth event.
- **Camp Crave**  
Our yearly youth camp will remain an in-person event. We believe Camp is an important part of the youth ministry for relationships being established and strengthened. In 2021 Camp Crave will most likely be held in the September school holidays to give a longer lead up for planning due to Covid-19. We hope to run an additional one-night or overnight 'Camp Crave' event on the Friday of the Labour day weekend, details TBC.

### Benefits:

- *Travel* to and from LG is only required once a month making it more easily accessible for families living further away, those with time pressures and for youth with parents unwilling to transport them. This also allows for more LG time and less travel time, great for youth with busy study loads that can switch straight off and get going with school tasks if they need.
- *Accessible*, having more online events creates an easily accessible entry point for youth inviting friends.
- *Zoom fatigue*, with the return to in-person learning this will likely be reduced, increasing the novelty and enjoyment of having online activities in the week.

- *Games*, youth have expressed their enjoyment in exploring the opportunities for online gaming together. Having once a month in-person will free up leaders to put greater energy into the activities and intentionality of that time.
- *Food*, a great aspect of meeting in person is that we can share food together! Due to Covid this has become more difficult, requiring greater planning and preparation. Sharing food just once-a-month will be an opportunity to keep doing so but without the weekly effort.
- *Community engagement*, a big hope of this model is that this can free up time to encourage both youth and leaders to engage missionally in the wider community. This could look like once a month encouraging the youth to volunteer together, plan a fundraiser for an issue they are passionate about, offer time to garden or clean for those that need a hand in the community etc. This will provide an additional opportunity to interact in-person with one-another, not only by learning about Jesus in LG but also through living out their faith in the Diamond Creek Community.
- *Creativity*, online youth ministry has forced us to think outside the box about how we keep doing DNA well, leading to some great opportunities to hear from other church members via video testimonies, explore quiet reflection times at home during life groups, make video retellings of the passages and more.

\* *Read more generally about youth and DNA at the end of this document*

#### *Risks:*

- *Connection*, meeting online can feel less natural and require intentional questioning and engagement from leaders. Therefore in-person meeting will be vital to deepen relationships and build trust that can be carried across to the online platform. In some cases, the necessity to be more direct online to elicit a response from the youth has balanced out the sharing time. In this way more typically reserved youth have shared more readily from the comfort of their own home.
- *Internet connection*, If a youth on an on-line week has internet limitations at home there will be an option to Zoom from St John's. Youth will need to notify their leaders four days in advance to ensure leaders are available to Zoom from church also that week.
- *Tiring*, some youth/ leaders have commented that Zoom-ing can be mentally exhausting while other more introverted types have enjoyed the reduction in in-person interaction (true for all people during Covid we think!)
- *Commitment*, youth may be inclined to attend the type of LG that they prefer e.g. just in person or just online. This must be addressed as the group creates their covenant for the year, ensuring each youth understands that each week regardless of the platform is important.

#### **How will the trial work?**

- The hybrid in-person/online model will be trialled for two months (February and March), after this feedback will be collected from Youth, Parents and leaders and a decision made moving forward.
- Over Feb/March youth will have regular opportunities to share their thoughts, questions and concerns about the model with the hope of improving as we go. We think this model could be great but really have to give it a go to see! We want youth to feel ownership over this process, their voice matters as we make decisions.

If you have any questions or concerns please don't hesitate to contact me,

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**\* DNA**

All Life Groups at St Johns are based around, Discipleship, Nurturing and Accountability (DNA), we find this serves as a great basis for youth life groups just like adults.

- **Discipleship:**  
We want our youth Life Groups to be places where Youth feel safe to wrestle with the big questions, share the struggles on their heart and be encouraged in practically following Jesus each day. We want this to be the case for both those that have known Jesus their whole lives and to youth that walk through the door for the very first time.
- **Nurturing:**  
We want to create a place where youth can 'Nurture' each other in the good and bad times. Offering support in prayer, conversation and in practical ways when life gets tough.
- **Accountability:**  
Youth Life Groups are more than just a 'Youth Program' but are about doing life together. This means genuinely caring about what each youth does in their lives. Often, we don't realize the power we have in being an adult that has a healthy relationship with Jesus. When youth observe this in adults, they start trying it out in their own lives.

How we do these things shifts and evolves with each group and across the year as the leaders discover what works best at that time and with those particular youth.

At the core we will always have components of reading the Bible, discussion, and prayer. Not only are these things core to us growing as followers of Jesus, but we also want to help Youth develop Bible reading and prayer skills that they can take with them into the rest of their lives.