

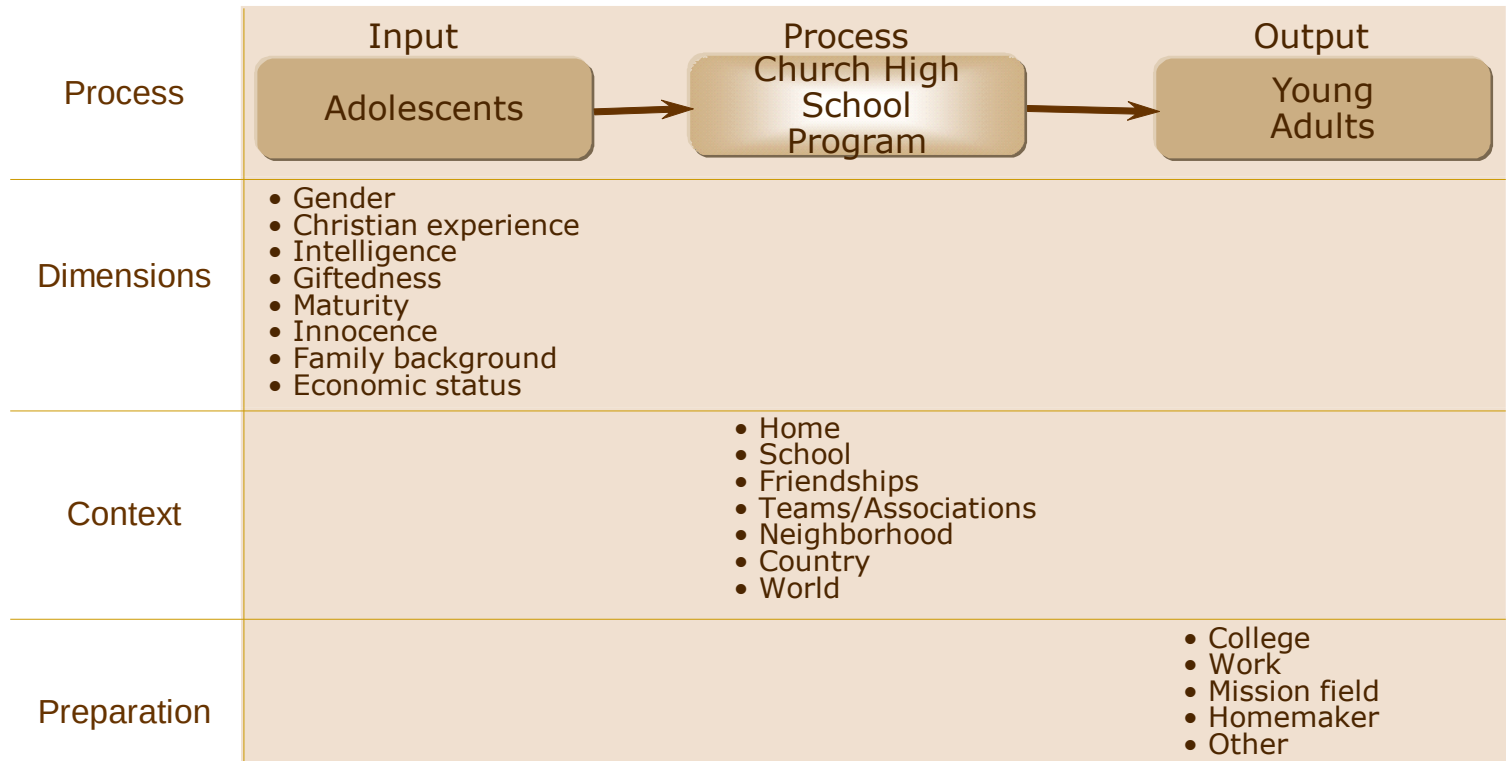
# PHILOSOPHY OF HIGH SCHOOL MINISTRY

## Underlying Philosophy

The philosophy that undergirds all that we do in the CHURCH High School group is set forth here as a set of beliefs and principles. We believe that this philosophy is appropriate for this particular group at this place and time. We expect to revisit it from time to time, and may change aspects of it as deemed necessary. This plan will be shared with the CHURCH leadership team and presented to the parents of our kids. We welcome any inquiry about it or suggestions for improvement.

## **Framework**

The principles elaborated in this document are laid out against this framework.



## **Adolescence**

We see a wide variety of adolescents coming into the HS group, with differences on a number of dimensions as shown above. In comparison to the recent past, we are now seeing Christian teens with less biblical literacy, as well as an increasing number of non-Christian teens with no church affiliation and little understanding of Judeo-Christian terminology or concepts.

The principles that are applicable in this space are these:

1. Christian teens will vary in their degree of maturity
2. Their commitment to the Lord and to spiritual disciplines may vacillate on a daily basis
3. While leaders can encourage commitment, they cannot force it; it will be the Lord who will make them will and do of his good pleasure
4. Leaders ought not to overreact to inconsistent commitment
5. Leaders may express disappointment over their kids' admitted failures, but ought not to be condescending or appear unduly shocked
6. Even spiritually stagnant kids can benefit from good training, even if it's only *filed away* until later

## ***The Cultural Milieu***

The world in which teens are living today has changed markedly in the past few years. Adult leaders who assume otherwise will have a diminished impact upon teens. The pace of this change is expected to accelerate even more quickly in coming years.

7. Leaders need to take the time to understand the teenage culture, an ongoing responsibility which will at times be unpleasant, uncomfortable, disturbing and even downright disgusting. Consequently, not everyone who “loves kids” can be an effective leader of teens; it takes a commitment more than merely loving kids.
8. Much interaction with teens will be fulfilling, and ultimately youth leadership can be a vital and enriching experience, despite the all-too-frequent setbacks.
9. The popular culture of today’s entertainment, media, music, and internet are having a major impact on our kids. Statistics show that even teens from conservative Christian families are not as protected as their parents might believe, and their behaviors are often not that different than their non-churched friends. Negative influences on kids, especially those outside of the church, can come directly from their parents themselves, for example, parents who reason that kids will drink or drug anyway, so they might as well do it at home.
10. Like the proverbial frog in the kettle, there are subtle changes over the past few years in both the culture and the church at large that have sapped the spiritual vitality of the average Christian teen. Studies evaluating what teens believe about values such as absolute truth and the authority of Scripture show significant trends away from traditional evangelical beliefs.
11. Public schools generally teach from a materialistic perspective, and intentionally omit any reference to God or the Christian religion from its curriculum. The teaching of evolution as an indisputable fact, and a revisionist teaching of history may be the most common examples of this.
12. Sadly, many Christian secondary schools and colleges no longer teach the days of creation as literal days, or Noah’s flood as global. Many leading evangelical scholars have also jettisoned these biblical teachings. At CHURCH, we see this as a significant departure from the faith, and an attack—albeit perhaps unintentional—against the very authority of Scripture. We cannot let the foundations be destroyed.
13. There is a growing, if not yet universal, philosophy taking root in the teenage culture. Labeled *post-modernism*, it is a philosophy that claims that denies absolute truth, so that every person must determine their own truth. A person with this mindset might typically respond to a Christian’s testimony that “that may be true for you, and that’s fine if you want to believe it. But it’s not true for me.”

## ***Training Our Christian Teens***

Regardless of the depth of biblical literacy our Christian teens come in with, in High School we need to go on to other things. Teaching more Bible stories as *mere* Bible stories simply won't cut it anymore (all CHURCH youth leaders are required to listen to the lecture by Ken Ham, [Genesis: The Key to Reclaiming Culture](#) that makes this point clear).

We cannot assume that all our kids will attend a Christian college. For those who don't, we cannot merely let them go on to adulthood without at least presenting some of the most critical basic knowledge and skills that we expect Christian adults to have. Therefore, by the time they complete high school, our teens will have received basic training in these areas:

14. A big-picture panoramic of Biblical content, seeing the connections among the pieces
15. An understanding of the history of the Bible, including the formation of the canon, etc.
16. To be able to defend the authority and accuracy of Scripture
17. Key biblical messages and themes at a deeper level than previously presented
18. See Early and Later HS Imperatives sections
19. See Ministry of Reconciliation
20. To understand Christianity as a comprehensive, logically-consistent worldview
21. To understand basically what's wrong with the major competing worldviews
22. To be able to answer "worldly" attacks against the Bible (e.g. evolution, age of the Earth, etc.).
23. To be able to answer "religious" attacks against the Bible (e.g. theological liberalism, high-church Sacred Tradition)
24. Understanding of CHURCH's key doctrinal positions
25. Knowledge in interpreting the Bible (basic hermeneutics)
26. Skills in studying the Bible (and online tools such as e-sword.net or Logos, etc.)

To cover all these topics is admittedly a daunting goal and we may not succeed on all counts. But we will build these things into our curriculum, and be faithful in delivering it. To the degree God blesses our effort, our kids will have lifelong benefit and the church will be well served; to the degree we assume from the outset that it is too large of an effort, we will fail in our responsibility to lead our kids.

## ***Skills Training for Effective Service***

We want our teens to serve God for the rest of their lives, whether it is in full-time Christian work or in a secular field. The high school years are critical times for teens that will make lifelong decisions. We need to help them prepare for and make those decisions.

27. We recognize that God may call our teens into a secular line of work just as well as he may call them into full-time Christian service. As rediscovered in the Reformation, no matter what our calling in life, we can serve God doing it by being the best we can be.
28. As leaders, we do not want to give the impression that secular work is "second-best." While God needs pastors, evangelists, and missionaries, he also needs Christian musicians, movie producers, physicians, politicians, professors, philosophers, philanthropists, garbage men, homemakers, and soldiers.
29. As leaders, our coaching to our teens needs to be customized to the specific individual, and based on their unique giftedness, both spiritual and natural giftedness.
30. We need to build the skills that we need in future church leaders – committee members, teachers, deacons, etc. We need to provide opportunities for teens to see these roles in action and gain experience with those that may be a fit for them.
31. We need to build skills for our teens to serve the church at large, in capacities such as inter-church relations, or parachurch ministries, etc.

32. We need to build the skills our teens will need to make a difference in society, such as to demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.
33. We recognize that some teens are not average. We need to provide appropriate training for those disabled in some way, and challenge those to whom much is given and much will be required.

### ***Early High School Imperatives***

The early high school years present unique opportunities and challenges. Nationwide statistical studies show that on average, kids are left home alone, trusted by their parents, around their 14<sup>th</sup> year of age. Further, the studies show that this increased level of freedom leads to a marked increase in undesirable behaviors such as alcohol, drug and sexual experimentation. Our kids need to be prepared appropriately before they encounter this freedom.

It is our belief that open, honest discussion about the temptations our kids will face, *along with clear standards and strong rationale for those standards*, needs to be presented in the early HS years (some may be appropriate even in Junior HS). Further, it is our belief that these presentations should be in lessons that are solely devoted to the topic and not merely as an add-on to a bible lesson. Only in this way can we encourage open disagreements and differences of opinion, while emphasizing the importance of the standards – the standards are not merely one person’s interpretation of a biblical passage; rather they are the logical result of a valid and comprehensive argument. And, only open discussion allows kids to ask their questions and receive intelligent, practical answers.

The following topics, at minimum, need to be factored into the curriculum:

34. Athletic competition and the Christian
35. Performance-enhancing drugs
36. Mind-altering drugs
37. Underage drinking
38. Adult use of alcohol (including why many/most CHURCH adults choose not to drink)
39. Smoking and tobacco use
40. Gambling
41. Witchcraft, white magic, etc.
42. Pornography
43. Sexuality; homosexuality; STDs
44. Contraception (this *may or may not* be included; some serious discussion around the philosophy of teaching this topic needs to occur among the CHURCH leaders and parents. In any case, to not address this we need to understand that we are defaulting to the position where our kids may learn about this from sources such as public schools promoting the myth of “safe sex”).

Again, it is understood that this is a daunting list, but today’s culture demands youth leaders who will rise to the challenge. And, it is our sincere belief that early HS is *not* too early to address these topics. As much as we’d all like to assume our kids don’t encounter these issues, the facts and the risks simply won’t let us be in denial.

## ***Later High School Imperatives***

The later high school years also have unique opportunities and challenges. This is a time when kids are making significant decisions about their future. And again, studies show that at this age -- when kids begin driving -- a significant increase in risky and undesirable behavior occurs.

45. Career planning: comparison of secular work, full-time ministry, homemaking, military service, self-employment, etc.
46. Determining the will of God for your life
47. Preparing for college
48. Moral dilemmas in college
49. Preparing for the workplace
50. Moral predicaments in the workplace
51. Preparing for marriage
52. Preparing for parenthood
53. Considering missionary work
54. Taking leadership roles in teaching younger kids
55. Being responsible for being a good role model

## ***Spiritual Giftedness***

The Holy Spirit has given gifts to every Christian for the purpose of building the church, both in depth (personal and corporate maturity) and in breadth (evangelism and missions). We believe that Christian teens should begin to discover what their specific gifts are and begin developing them and using them. Their leaders should be sensitive to each kid's unique skills and provide custom opportunities for them to serve in new ways, and grow in their gifted areas.

It is common for youth leaders to provide career counseling by asking kids what they *like* to do. We believe it is more helpful in guiding them to take God's point of view rather than their own, and to ask what is ultimately *important*. Too many kids embark on careers that they think they would like, only to find out their likes change over the years—then where have we led them? By contrast, what they deem is important to God today is likely to remain that way.

There are a number of roles in the church that are required for it to function well. We need to prepare our kids for these roles so that they can lead the church in the future. They need these things:

56. Training on giftedness and service to the church
57. Diagnostic tools to help them identify their potential gifts
58. Specific training or materials provided around the specific gifts
59. Safe opportunities to try out identified/potential gifts
60. Coaching and feedback from leaders
61. Real opportunities to serve and make a difference
62. Recognition for contributions made

The church occasionally finds that it cannot find volunteers for needed service. This can happen when we don't train folks how to do those things. Through this emphasis of the HS ministry, we will see, for example, kids with the administrative gift helping in the church office or sitting in on committee meetings, or kids with the teaching gift training younger kids or peers. Then when the Lord calls, they will be ready, willing and able.

## ***The Ministry of Reconciliation***

While some kids may have been given the gift of evangelism, or pastor-teacher, even those that don't are called to the ministry of reconciliation. All Christians are expected to have a ready defense of their faith, and to produce fruit. At CHURCH, we have a passion around world missions, and at the same time for local outreach. We know that while the gospel message is readily available throughout our country, most of our closest neighbors are still lost. While we send and support our missionaries, we must labor at home to expand Christ's kingdom and redeem the culture, one person at a time.

It is our belief that training comes before ministry. We observe how God prepared Moses for 40 years, Paul for 3 years, and even Jesus for 40 days before their public ministries began. To send our kids out to share and defend their faith before we have given them the tools and information to do so, will likely be frustrating, fruitless and discouraging. Bad experiences early on can result in never trying again.

Proper training for effective outreach includes these topics:

63. The basics of the gospel – the non-negotiables; what does it really mean to be saved?

64. Explaining the gospel in simple terms

65. Giving a compelling, personal testimony

66. Skills in CPR (Cultivating, Planting and Reaping)

67. The basics of apologetics and worldview thinking (see GROWTH above)

68. Basics understanding of the secular mind, and post-modern thinking

69. Ability to provide some reasoning behind the concept of absolute truth

70. Ability to provide some reasons for believing in the accuracy of Scripture

71. Ability to give some explanation why Scripture must be the sole authority for life

Once again, training will be supplemented by opportunities to practice and use the knowledge and skills, with appropriate coaching and feedback by leaders.

## ***Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes***

The goals that we have set for our kids includes 3 dimensions: knowledge, skills and attitudes.

- We want them to **know** certain things:
  - To know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and
  - To attain a certain level of knowledge of biblical and theological truths.
- We want them to experience various kinds of service for God's kingdom and to begin to build **skills** that are appropriate to their unique giftedness. We want them to find an avenue where they actually use their skills for the benefit of others.
- We want them to have appropriate **attitudes** that complement their knowledge and skills and are fitting to a child of God. These would include, for example:
  - Humility to balance their knowledge
  - A servant's heart in using their skills
  - Honor and respect for parents and other authorities
  - A passion for the Lord and his service
  - A love for others driven by the love of Christ
  - A forgiving spirit that emulates God's
  - A deep gratitude for the spiritual blessings and other gifts of God
  - An appreciation of and a commitment to the family of God

The preplanned curriculum outline that we've developed specifically addresses the *knowledge* and *skills* components. We believe that *attitudes* are more caught than taught, and therefore are developed as kids interact with their leaders. Consequently, special event such as retreats, where kids get to really learn what makes their leaders tick, will often focus on attitudinal issues. One requirement for our volunteer youth leaders is that they consistently demonstrate and promote these kinds of attitudes in all their relationships with the kids.

## ***Evaluation and Assessment***

72. We believe we need to assess how effective our programs are, in all its dimensions.

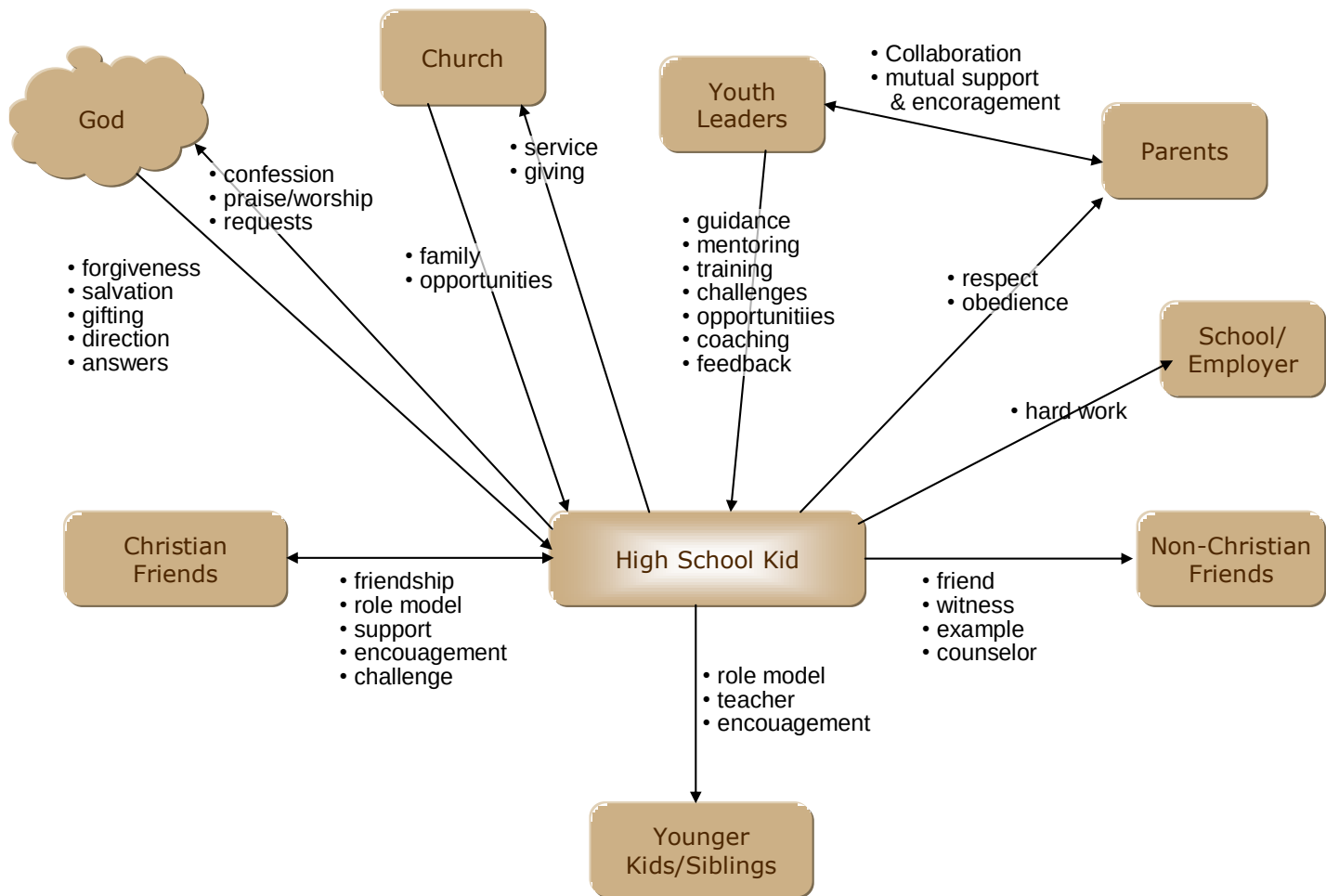
- a. To ensure that our kids know Christ, we give them ample opportunity, in appropriate settings, to give their testimony, and express their spiritual progress.
- b. To ensure that they are becoming biblically and theologically literate, we will incorporate standard testing instruments. We may incorporate pre- and post-testing, and may communicate individual scores back to the students and/or their parents, and composite (confidential) scores back to CHURCH leadership.
- c. To assess skill development, we will provide real-life opportunities to use key skills, under the watchful eye of leaders, who will provide appropriate coaching and feedback.
- d. To gauge attitudes, our youth leaders will be trained to be observant and to praise successes and encourage improvement where necessary. We will provide mentoring opportunities for kids to deal with issues of the heart on a confidential basis when the need arises.

We will provide for our kids:

73. Unthreatening opportunities to express their honest, intellectual doubts

74. Opportunities for 1-on-1 mentoring to express their heartfelt needs

## Key Roles & Responsibilities of the HS Student



## Other Areas to Address

There are other areas that need to be addressed. These would include items such as:

75. Security/background/reference checks on volunteers. Maybe CANTS checks are appropriate for youth workers.
76. Policies related to interpersonal relationships, such as leaders dating students, and avoiding compromising situations, etc.