



Dear Church Family,

What a year 2019 has been! It was a year where we built on some great foundations and brought further clarity to our mission and values as a youth group. Overall, I'd say our past year was a success. March 1st will mark my two-year anniversary as the Student Ministries Pastor here at Hope Fellowship. It seems like the time has just flown by. As the old adage says, "Time flies when you're having fun." And we've certainly had our fair share of fun activities over the past year.

We began our January with our annual registration push for the big Spring events of Youth Conference and Fine Arts Festival. When it comes to planning events like these you can never have too much time. In order to streamline our registration process and save on some administrative follow-up we tried a new thing called Sign-Up Night. Parents were able to sign all the paperwork and permission slips for all our big spring events in one sitting. Hopefully it saved all of us some headaches.

In January we tried out a new event for us and participated in the Potomac Youth's Winterblast Ski Days at Wisp. (Or, rather I should say we tried to participate in the Ski Days.) That morning a blizzard was making its way across the state and whiteout conditions prevented us from making it all the way there. After driving already for three hours, and not wanting to disappoint a couple vanloads of students we made a quick detour to Falling Waters, WV and spent the day there at our Network's campground. We made a day of it, with board games and sledding, snowball fights and hot chocolate. In the end, our students had so much fun with that back-up plan we decided to make it into its own full-fledged event. We're calling it The Chill Out: Winter Retreat, and it seems to be an event students will enjoy for years to come. Little things like that remind us that sometimes our greatest triumphs come out of moments of setback.

As always Youth Con in March was a wonderful time, enjoyed by all. We were able to bring many students to conference last year, just over 35 teenagers! That's almost 90% of our average weekly attendance on Wednesday night. It's a feat we couldn't have accomplished without the help of dedicated youth leaders who sacrificed their time and resources to serve our students that weekend. (It took about a dozen youth leaders to keep an eye on all those kids.)

Our students deepened their relationship with God over the course of that two-day event. Many reported a newfound passion to follow Christ, several students surrendered their lives to Christ for the first time, and a few even experienced the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, while praying at the altar. The beautiful thing about an event like Youth Con, is that the experience follows students outside of service. One group of boys decided after the first night's service to return to their hotel room and have a late-night prayer meeting, which lasted into the early hours of the morning!

The passion students kindled at Conference returned with them to our weekly gatherings on Wednesday nights. The season after conference is one of my favorite times to preach because the students are invigorated with enthusiasm and energy to go after God with all that they have! It makes a preacher's job easy.

The following month was a time full of preparation for the district Fine Arts Festival. As always, our multi-talented students outdid themselves and earned spots in the National Fine Arts Festival later that year in Orlando, FL. For the first time our church fielded a drama team. Those students took me on my word when I told them that if they would listen to my coaching tips and practice hard each week, they could make it to Nationals. It was a big promise to make, but our students came through and performed their hearts out. And it earned all of them a chance to compete at the national level. All in all, we had 8 students advance, which meant we had to find a way to get them all there come August.

Planning and preparing began the very next week, as the whole staff came together and strategized the logistics of taking a dozen people to Florida. The next few months were spent buying plane tickets, finding hotel rooms, renting vehicles, registering for the event itself, and most important of all fundraising. Several parents came together and developed and pulled off the idea of a crab feast raffle. It was a brilliant idea, that not only got us out into the community to promote our students but also helped raise all the money that we needed.

Summer is always a busy time at Hope Fellowship, and last year was no different. Between camps, VBS, youth events, and National Fine Arts we all had our schedules packed. Youth Camp was another wonderful success last year, and like conference we had a record attendance! 22 students signed up for Camp last year, which made Hope Fellowship one of the largest groups in attendance that week. To put it into perspective, we had more students there than churches who are more than double our size. I mention that not to brag, but to give credit to the support of this wonderful congregation, who make it possible for our students to attend Camp every year with their Christmas in July giving. The transportation cost that is offset by your giving allows us to reach more students, who might not have been able to attend due to the price of camp.

Following right on the heels of Camp, was National Fine Arts in Orlando, FL. We had been planning and preparing for months and it was finally here. Everyone seemed to be all at once completely nervous and totally excited. It turned out to be a wonderful week full of great performances, wonderful times of fellowship, and to top it all off a day spent at Disney World. You couldn't ask for a better culmination for the months of hard work put in by the students, their parents, the staff of Hope, and especially the youth pastor.

After a busy year of big events and globetrotting, we typically take the Fall season to slow down and refocus. This past fall, after about a year of planning, decided to refocus our vision and change the name of the youth group. We retired the name Relevant Youth, after fully accomplishing that mission and became Hope Youth. The refocus is designed to identify us with the mission, values, and goals of the church at large. Our new values can be summed up in a W.O.R.D., Worship. Others. Relationships. Devotion. We are all about worship because God is first. We know there is always room at the table for others. We focus on relationships because

we are better off together as a community. And we are devoted to a mindset of progress that results from the process. It is our mission to provide Hope for today and Hope for the future.

As we look to the future and focus our vision on where we are going, we have committed ourselves to live out these values. Everything we do in the Student Ministries Department, from our big events to Wednesday night services to Sunday morning discipleship classes filters through that mission and values. If it doesn't fit our values, we don't do it. We improve the things we are already doing by looking at how they are achieving those goals.

It can be difficult to sum up the entire experience of a whole year in Youth Ministry. In fact, this letter is merely a glance at some of the major highlights. The stuff that we had to overlook far outnumbers the things we were able to include. The only way to truly know what goes on in the trenches over the course of the year is to be there with us. The joy and pleasure of working with teens during these formative years of their spiritual lives is unmatched by any other form of ministry.

So as always, if you are interested in making an impact in the next generation, there are several ways to do so:

First, I always remind people that the easiest thing they can do to support us is to remember us in their prayers. It seems like such a simple thing, but it can make an eternal difference in these students lives.

Second, if you have one of these students in your care, reinforce what they're learning at Hope Youth. Ask them questions about what they learned each week. Have conversations about how they can put those lessons into practice in their daily life. Model a Christ-like walk not only at church but in your home as well. Parents and guardians are the primary spiritual influence in a child's life. When we partner together, lives can be changed, attitudes can be corrected, and students are set out on a path to success for the rest of their lives!

Finally, and most importantly, you can give of your own time and serve these kids on a weekly basis. This ministry doesn't happen without your help. If you've ever been a teen you are already qualified! The most rewarding thing a person can do with their life is to invest in the next generation. Come alongside our students, learn from them and you'll have an opportunity to influence the course of their lives for years to come.

I will close with a word of thanks. I am truly grateful and appreciate the opportunity that has been given to me to minister to these students. I count it all joy, the chances I get to speak into their lives and use my experience and knowledge to lead them into greater relationship with Jesus Christ. With eyes focused on Him, all the temporary setbacks, the troubles of this life, and the pain of ministering to broken people fades in the light of his glory. God will continue to do great things through this church and this youth group if we continue to keep our vision clear and focused on Him. Thank you for being a part of that mission.

Blessings,

Pastor Tim