

I want to begin by thanking you for all that you do, and the work that you continue to do in showing up as a consistent, positive change in each kid in Manistee County. I hope that this packet can shed some light on what Young Life does and how it can serve as a guide for you in bringing the Gospel to the kids you cross paths with. Please don't be afraid to reach out to me about any questions you might have.

Young Life is an incarnational, non-denominational/ecumenical youth ministry that focuses on living life alongside kids. Incarnational means that we are actively living the Good News of the Gospel and story of Jesus. Jesus has called you to these moments with kids where they want to know more about Him. All of this simply put; we show up, we build friendships with them, and we share the Gospel. No matter their response we continue to love them.

As a brief overview,

Creation is the starting point for thinking about God's story. God brought into being, out of the swirling chaos, the beauty of the created order. He repeatedly said in Genesis 1 that, "it was good." Human beings were the pinnacle of creation, made in God's image, the only part of creation given special honor. At that point, God called it all, "very good." To be made in God's image means we are meant to live in closeness to God, in relationship with him, so that our hearts love what He loves. We're meant to be his agents of creation, empowered to care for, protect, and guide all of creation according to God's wise order. It means that we were meant to live in rich fellowship with other humans in such a way that everything we do in those relationships never hurts others but always brings dignity and respect for the fact that all people are bearers of God's image. Deep down in our bones, we all have this sense that "we were made for more and not less." It's telling that no one has to be taught this fundamental truth. We just know it. We long for more because we were made for more. That is true of you and it's true of every young person you encounter.

The **Fall**, of course, is where human beings go off the relational rails, choosing what suits them and taking God's place in deciding what is good or wise. That means our hearts no longer love what God loves but only what we want and desire for ourselves. It means that our power and authority become something we use against others for our own purposes. It means that relationships are primarily about taking and keeping rather than giving and receiving. We consume instead of contribute. It's what most of us know, unfortunately, as 'normal' life, the reality of our existence. And yet... there is a gnawing sense that this is not how it's supposed to be. Even though sin has trapped us, distorting every longing and desire in us so that we are continuously being dehumanized to the point of death, we still have this nagging sense that we were made for more and not less.

Redemption is the long, impressive, and gracious story of the relentless and unchanging love of the Triune God. He does not abandon his Creation, especially his people who are trapped and helpless in sin. On the contrary, he goes to great lengths to draw them back to himself, initially

through forming his people Israel who were meant to be a light to the whole world. Ultimately, this was accomplished through the work of his son Jesus Christ who was, in himself, the light of the whole world.

The work of Jesus is about his announcement of a kingdom, a new way of life, that actually sounded a lot like the original way of life in the Garden. Through his sacrificial death, we are freed from the bondage of sin that has trapped us in the ‘normalcy’ of a dehumanizing life. Through the power of his resurrection, we are freed unto a life of wholeness where creation begins to be restored to its original order and humans begin to reclaim their role as God’s image-bearers.

Restoration is the final act in the story and it is the promise that God will one day complete the work he has begun, “making all things new.” [Rev 21:5] He is doing that renewing work now and has the power and will to bring it to its fullness. It means that not only will every injustice be made right and every pain comforted, but every tear will also be wiped away. It means that the earth will be filled full (fulfilled) with joy and delight. A clear understanding of the restoring work of God is important because it gives redeemed human beings a vision for the mission of image-bearing. Now, because of the Holy Spirit in us, we get to join in with God in his restoring work.

In Gospel conversations with kids, we may not use the language of, “**Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration,**” very often. It’s typically not the language they use in describing their own story. However, they still know in their bones the basics of those words because they were created in the image of God. It’s the story they were made for. How can we explain it in terms they understand?

If a kid is interested in learning more about God, or begins asking questions, we can filter it through the “Ought, Is, Can, Will” language. **What Ought to Be** [Creation], **What Is** [Fall], **What Can Be** [Redemption], and **What Will Be** [Restoration].

Everyone senses deep down that this world is not as it should be. Interestingly, if the Fall didn’t actually happen and there was no such thing as sin, no one could claim, “things are not the way they should be.” But people do make that claim. All the time. Regardless of whether they follow Jesus or claim to be atheist. They just know it to be true. Isn’t that interesting? That’s because it is true! The reason is that in creation, all things were created good and fashioned into existence for the purpose of flourishing, joy, and abundance. This is especially true for human beings, the pinnacle of God’s creation. This is how things **ought to be**. In any Gospel conversation, we can affirm any person who articulates the sense that things are not what they should be.

When you are actively meeting with kids and diving into their lives, Young Life calls this “Contact Work”. You’re there. You’re showing up. You’re ready for those conversations. This next section will be about Contact Work and the biblical foundation that it has.

The idea of contact work is built on an understanding of how God chose to communicate His character to mankind. John 1:14 says “the Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” We go to young people for the same reason that Christ came to us - to reveal God to them.

Jesus is our example for contact work. He spent enough time with common people that He was often criticized for being a friend of sinners (Luke 15). He taught that where He spent His time and how He conducted His ministry was an expression of God’s passion for the lost. Based on the stories we have of His life, Jesus spent more time with people in the streets and in their homes than meeting them in the synagogue.

Our impetus for contact work, specifically with those furthest out, unaware or uninterested in who Jesus is can be seen in this quote by Pope Francis:

*“You, who work in the field of youth ministry, do valuable work for the Church. You are the ones who accompany young people on their path, helping them to find the way that leads to Christ. More than promoting a series of activities for young people, **you walk with them**, accompanying them personally in the complex and at times difficult contexts in which they are immersed. And in this connection, a true dialogue can be engaged in by the one who lives a **personal relation** with the Lord Jesus, which overflows into the relation with others.”*

We go to young people for the same reason that Christ came to us - to reveal God to them. You must love them because they need love, because God loves them and wants to love them through you. This concept is one you may have to grow into, but with Christ in you, the incarnation is still in process in the world today.

A Biblical basis for contact work can be seen throughout scripture. Below are a few references for you to look up and be familiar with for your next training dialogue. Set aside some time to read through them all, noting what stands out to you and what connections you make with your understanding of contact work.

Life of Christ:

- John 1:10-14
- John 4:1-42
- Luke 5:27-31
- Luke 15:1-2
- Matthew 4:19
- Matthew 9:35-38

Life of Paul and New Testament:

- Philippians 2:5-11
- 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6
- 1 Thessalonians 2:1-3, 8
- 1 Corinthians 4:5
- Colossians 1:15
- Colossians 4:5-6
- Hebrews 1:1-3

Three Levels of Contact Work:

- **Being seen:** being seen wherever kids are, becoming a part of the environment, your presence speaks of your interest in their lives, hang out where kids hang out within your context of ministry (this may include parent/guardian approval)
- **Talking:** having conversations with kids and developing relationships, speaking about things that are of interest to kids (become a student of their world)
- **Doing:** hanging out with kids, building memories, developing trust, intentional, initiated and focused.

Let's be honest; contact work can be intimidating. You've probably heard the phrase that comes up when you are in the world of kids, "Don't you have any friends your own age?" And if you haven't, you will. We are doing cross-cultural ministry. We are breaking down walls and stereotypes. We must ask ourselves some questions. What exactly are our fears? What are some steps to help us overcome them?

A good first move forward is to create a Contact Work plan! It's ideal to create a routine or rhythm in our approach to kids — it's good to have a plan that holds you accountable! Vary the type and time you plan to do contact work. When you go, don't give off the impression that you are there to build club. ***You're there to build relationships.***

Each time you are preparing to go do contact work, ask yourself the following:

- Have I spent time in prayer for kids that I know and kids that I have yet to meet?
- Why am I doing contact work at this particular place or in this way?
- What do I expect to accomplish? Who am I trying to see and why?
- What is my goal for contact work today?

All a kid wants is an adult who consistently shows up and listens. The issue we might face is that we love to carry our own **self-serving agenda** wherever we go. When in conversation we are not there to barely listen and focus on the end goal. God has placed you in that situation with a kid for a reason. Remember to slow yourself down and truly listen to who they are and what they're thinking. God has his agenda, open your heart and your mind to be used by Him for what He calls you to.