

A MINISTRY OF PRESENCE

**breaking down barriers and
crossing borders to make
strangers into neighbors**

inside the 2022 camp experience
new at youthfront | youthfront mvps



Presence-Centered

"Be still, and know that I am God." Psalm 46:10

Being presence-centered in our lives and ministries is something we desire at Youthfront. It is so easy to find ourselves imprisoned and bound by baggage from the past... or striving to work hard in hopes of finally securing a better life in the future. As a result, life passes us with what can feel like increasing speed. We become numb and ignore the present moments we have to live, learn and love. The desire to practice the presence of God is not some new, innovative, theological, or spiritual construct. Presence-centered life and ministry has occurred in all cultures and in all times when Christianity has been lived out passionately and faithfully. Being presence-centered is about shaping our lives to notice and experience the reality of God's presence all around us.

We live in what philosopher Charles Taylor calls a "secular age." Taylor describes how and why Western society moved from an enchanted world in the year 1500 (a time pregnant with transcendence and almost universal acceptance of the reality of God) to 500 years later when society finds itself firmly entrenched in what he calls an "immanent frame." In this immanent frame, faith appears extremely fragilized in a society hyper-skeptical about the existence of a God—especially a God people actually encounter.

However, Taylor declares that while we live in a secular age, people still desire something transcendent that points to a reality beyond what can be definitively explained. Being presence-centered is about living life to the full through resonant relationships of encounter, not only within ourselves, but also with others, with God, and with God's creation. Living a presence-centered spirituality is infused with a tangible practice of noticing and awareness of the presence of God. Being presence-centered nurtures our heart to be saturated by devotion to God and thoughts of God. Presence-centered spirituality attunes a person's life to live in such a way to journey with the Spirit of Christ in every moment and experience along the way.

Practicing a presence-centered spirituality nurtures eyes that become open to seeing a hidden God at work in the world, and ears that hear the Holy Spirit speaking to us and through God's creation. God, in Christ Jesus, moves us to become present to ourselves, to others, to God, and to all of God's creation. We come alive to the reality that Jesus Christ is with us giving life to the full. We declare, "God is God," which doesn't satisfy the explanation demanded by the secular age but is a proclamation that God, who is indescribable, still acts in the secular age. Presence-centered spirituality is Christocentric, embracing the transcendent and immanent reality that in Christ we live and move and have our very being. Presence-centered spirituality and ministry proclaims Jesus Christ is Lord, and in and through Jesus Christ we become God's Beloved. This is not something only young people need. We all need to be reminded that God, in Christ, is with us and we are the beloved children of God.

NEW AT YOUTHFRONT

YF Family Reaches Local and Regional Audiences

Youthfront Senior Director of Family Ministries Jamie Roach had the opportunity to speak to hundreds of parents and families in the KC Metro and beyond this past spring. Thank you to each of the churches who hosted parenting seminars for their church body and community, including First Baptist Church of Athens, Texas.

If your church is interested in hosting speaking engagements with Jamie, you may contact him at jroach@youthfront.com. A licensed therapist, Jamie is able to speak on a variety of marriage and parenting topics, and also serves as lead counselor for Youthfront's affiliate, Presence-Centered Counseling.

Mike King Earns Doctor of Ministry Degree

Congratulations to Youthfront President and CEO, Mike King! Mike recently defended his doctoral dissertation, "Presence-Centered Spirituality: Living with Resonance in the Secular Age." His dissertation was awarded "Distinguished Dissertation" by the academic faculty at Nazarene Theological Seminary.

With Gratitude To...

Youthfront would like to offer a big "Thank You!" to our event sponsors this past year. Our Christmas at Camp sponsors were: the Burbridge Family Foundation, Tigris Construction, Mike & Vicki King, Keller & Owens, The Craft Family, Christ Community Church Olathe, Thomas McGee, Amborn Stone, Bank Midwest, PhanPharm, US Foods, Richard Shriver Photography, and Performance Foods.

Our 2022 What's Good in the Neighborhood partners, who helped underwrite the event were: UMB, Universal Construction, Christ Community Church Olathe, and Lyle & Shari DenHerder. Thank you to all for your support!

New Faces at Youthfront

Youthfront welcomed the following new staff since the last issue of Youthfront News in October: Mariah Eiman, Administrative Assistant; Phil Kim, Center for Youth Ministry Training (CYMT) Resident; Ed Cowell, Camp Facilities Associate; Katie Mussat, Program Coordinator of Cabin Leaders & Volunteers; Shawna Wallace, Administrative Specialist in Admin & HR.



Jamie Roach of YF Family speaks in Athens, Texas



Mike King with NTS Professor Dean Blevins at commencement



Youthfront staff and volunteers at What's Good in the Neighborhood

A Ministry of Presence

“Stay here and keep watch with me” - Matthew 27:38



Missional Journey participants from Western Christian High School look out over Ciudad Acuña, Mexico.

Sometimes we're called to just sit and listen.

Volunteers on a mission or serve trip often feel most useful doing specific tasks: wielding a hammer and paintbrush, or helping stock shelves with food. And while there's a clear need for that work, being Christ's hands and feet sometimes means simply being still.

Those participating with YF Neighborhood's local and international ministries discover the lasting impact of place-sharing - a ministry of presence with those they're coming alongside.

Stay here and keep watch: Ciudad Acuña, Mexico

The day before, it was sunny and pleasant. A day full of activity—shopping for rice, beans, oil and other pantry items to make food baskets for 200 migrant families; coordinating with a Christian rehab center to make over 1500 tamales for a Christmas party at a community center turned migrant shelter, and lining up entertainment. It was a magical night. An impossible one, really. In what other place might you find Haitians and Africans, Central Americans and North Americans gathering together over food, laughter, prayer and dancing? It felt like a kind of living parable, a dress rehearsal for the Great Banquet where at least for one night, the distinctions between us blurred at a table where everyone had enough.

But this morning the skies are overcast on the southern bank of the Rio Grande. We huddle together under a mesquite tree as raindrops fall like tears from thorny branches. Our guide this morning is Suly, a thirty-something Haitian woman, mother of three. Suly points across the river. “That’s where the border patrol rounded us up.” For several days, she and thousands of other Haitian migrants were encamped under the international bridge with the belief that the US had opened the door for asylum seekers once again. “But once they started capturing us for deportation, we turned around and waded back across the river right here.”

Listening to Suly and other Haitians tell their stories and bear their wounds, you can't help but feel the weight of their suffering. Their longings are so basic, so elemental, every human with a conscience knows them. "Why did I take this journey?" one of the Haitian men named Stanley pleaded with us. Stanley's grandmother (who raised him and he calls "mom") lives in Orlando, Florida. "It's not that I wanted to take this path. I just want to see my mom." He paused to collect himself. "I found out that my dad passed away through Facebook. I'm not going to let my mom die far away from me. I have to see her. I have to see her."

To be honest, we didn't "do" much during our few days on the border. We restocked the migrant shelters with supplies. We helped them throw a big Christmas party they'd dreamed of doing, but didn't have the resources for. We left funds from donors to meet ongoing needs. But mostly, we just listened. We ate meals with them. We forged deeper relationships with our partners doing the day to day work. But mostly, we just listened to their stories. Bearing witness becomes a way of holding another's pain. It's not fixing it. It's a choice to stay vigil. To share their quiet torment with them. To remind them they're not alone. To allow their wounds to wound us.

There, by the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept. There on the mesquite tree, we hung our harps because Stanley can't see his mom. Because Suly hasn't seen her other two children in 5 years.

When Jesus faced his own abandonment and death, when his soul was overwhelmed with sorrow, Jesus requested three of his disciples, "Stay here and keep watch with me" (Matt. 27:38). He didn't ask them to fix it—even though Peter tried. Jesus just asked them to stay and keep watch so he wouldn't be so alone. I can't say that we fixed anything on the border. But I can say that we held one another. That we kept watch. That they felt less alone.

—Kurt Rietema, YF Neighborhood



Haitian native, Suly, shares her story of her heartache at the Rio Grande.

In addition to Ciudad Acuña, Youthfront hosted multiple Missional Journey groups this past spring in Croc, Mexico, and in the neighborhood of Argentine, Kansas City, KS. Youthfront's High School ministry took youth on a spring break journey to Croc.

"This trip was one of the most meaningful adventures of my life," wrote Will, age 16. "I learned that I am really good with kids, that I want to learn Spanish, and that you can find God's love everywhere."

The group of teenagers from Kansas City served alongside Croc host site youth and friends, helping with the afterschool program that is an anchor of Youthfront's Mexico ministry. Small moments provided life-changing experiences: painting projects, games and crafts with kids, worship and prayer. Tutorials in tortilla-making built friendship bonds.

"I learned I have a heart for ministry and I need to put it to use," Olivia, age 17, wrote of her Croc trip.



Missional Journey participants from Northwestern College play with kids in the after-school program in Croc, Mexico (left). High schoolers in Youthfront's Teen Staff program pose with students from Croc, Mexico, during their Missional Journey over Spring Break 2022 (right).



Middle school camper, Will, holds up his camper journal.

Inside the 2022 Camp Experience

A trip to a place called Insecurity Island? Probably doesn't sound like a fun destination, but it's just one of the many unique experiences for campers at Youthfront this summer.

Youthfront's summer camp curriculum, *Follow Me*, explores what it meant to be a follower of Jesus in his time and what it means for us today. Overnight campers work through their Camper Journal to discover new ways to see Jesus' invitation.

"The Settlers of Insecurity Island" is a cabin experience patterned after the popular game Settlers of Catan, but designed to help campers unpack the story of Jesus' disciples competing over who is the greatest. Matt Saunders, director of Youthfront Camp West and an expert in games and theology of play, explains that the campers have to trade resources in order to earn gold coins to get to a party on Insecurity Island.

"The idea is the distribution of resources is unfair and will force campers to look around the circle and say 'Hey, why does that person have so many coins already?' or 'Why does he or she have a different ability than what I have?'" Saunders said. "It really fosters conversations about how we can get trapped into competing with each other, and how Jesus actually calls us to serve one another and have compassion for one another."

Youthfront's staff design cabin reflections, experiences and interactive conversations for campers to reinforce each summer's Biblical themes. Each day at camp, the camp Storyteller shares those stories during the large group worship gatherings. Those gatherings are followed by small group cabin discussions or experiences. In addition, campers experience the Youthfront daily prayer offices while at camp. This approach to camp, Youthfront's presence-centered community and approach to situated learning, reflects a "community of Christian practice" modeled after Jesus.

Saunders shared how camp provides intentional time for campers both together as a community and to spend time alone with God. One morning cabin experience, for example, reinforces the themes in the story of Jesus with Mary and Martha.

"What Mary was applauded for by Jesus was spending time with him," Saunders said. "We want to elevate different ways for our campers to spend time with Jesus. We hope those will be tools they can bring home and can be more than just closing your eyes and bowing your head to pray - but also some other interactive ways to spend time alone with Jesus."

Watch our 2022 camp highlight videos at
youtube.com/youthfront

Youthfront MVPs

Spotlighting volunteers and leaders serving our ministry



nathan ginther

Nathan has a heart for service that stands out among his generation. Now in his third year on Teen Staff, Nathan has been a tireless volunteer not just at Youthfront Camp in the summer, but year-round serving in other Youthfront programs and events. Nathan will be a junior at Blue Valley High School and has been a part of Youthfront since his first Camp experience in third grade. We asked him how he got involved and what motivates him to serve.:

"I've been involved with Youthfront for many years, first as a camper and then as a part of Teen Staff. In addition to Camp, I've been able to serve with What's Good in the Neighborhood and Christmas at Camp. As a lifeguard at Camp, I try to create a safe and fun experience for the campers. The community and connection I've been a part of at Youthfront is uplifting and positive and I love making new connections and friendships each time I get to serve. Youthfront has helped me grow as a person. The lessons I've learned and the mentors I've gained are invaluable. I wish that every kid would have the opportunity to be a part of a community like this."

cynthia smith

Cynthia first became connected with Youthfront as a camp parent, sending her four sons to Camp West through the years. Over time, she has become involved beyond camp, serving with a joyful heart in the Argentine neighborhood of Kansas City, KS. This year, Cynthia is excited to become a camp grandparent as two of her grandchildren will get to experience Youthfront Camp for the first time. We asked her what got her involved in serving and what keeps her coming back:

"I love to serve; it is a blessing to me. Several of the ministries I volunteered with ended, and I was seeking something new to be involved in. I asked my friend Jim Newberry if there were some opportunities with Youthfront. Jim told me about Something to Eat and working with a student attending school virtually. I started helping with the monthly food distribution and working weekly with a lovely student for a semester. One of the gifts I have is the gift of 'help' (1 Cor. 12:28). I love to serve others. I love to work alongside the Argentine community and the volunteers to bless others which is really a blessing to me."





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Your hand in our mission...

There are so many great things happening at Youthfront! How can you get involved? How can you be a part of bringing youth into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ?



LEND A HAND

There are lots of ways you can help out at Youthfront!

- Be a Volunteer Cabin Leader for a session of camp.
- Host a Something to Eat™ packing party at your church or office.
- Serve others in KC and beyond with a YF Neighborhood Experience.
- Sort and distribute groceries to those in need at our monthly Food Distribution.



MAKE A GIFT

Financial gifts make it possible for us to continue to grow and serve youth and families in these ways and more:

- Scholarships for kids in need to attend Youthfront
- New games, sports equipment and facility updates
- Ministry leadership experiences for college students
- Shelf-stable meals for those facing hunger



SPREAD THE WORD

Tell your friends and neighbors about the great things happening at Youthfront, like:

- Youthfront Camp and Day Camp
- Teen Staff and Summer Staff
- YF Neighborhood Experiences and Missional Journeys
- Something to Eat™ and monthly Food Distributions
- Presence-Centered Counseling for kids, teens, couples and adults

To learn more about these opportunities, visit youthfront.com and follow us on our social channels.

