

February 2021

# YOUNG LIFE

Where teens are loved by God



You were  
made for  
this



# WE GROW IN THE VALLEY

It may feel like COVID-19 has stopped ministry, but God is still growing within teens and drawing them to Him

## Area Director Report

### Tom Parker



Since we are not able to have our Annual Young Life Gala this year, we wanted to share with you how God has blessed this ministry and also what our needs are as we continue to reach teenagers for Jesus.

As I reflect on 2020, I understand for some of us, it has been a time of concern, frustration, and loss, yet to others joy, blessing and excitement.

Personally, I have felt blessed to have been given extra time

with my family. It was the end of my daughter's senior year, and I had the opportunity to be with her the last several months before she headed off to college at UF. I would have never been given that blessing in a normal year. Also, the chance to play with my children and to be a teacher at home reminds me how blessed we are.

Though ministry did not look the same, we still saw fruitful ministry. We were able to meet kids where they were, at home, in their driveways (six

feet apart) and bring them homemade cupcakes, signs, toilet paper, and a smile. So many of our teens felt isolated and missed the interaction of people. Some of their parents were considered essential workers and they could not stay home with their child. Teen suicide rates in Florida continued to increase, even more with Hispanic and Black males. Through it all, my heart has remained the same to see EVERY TEEN in this area find Jesus.

Since starting as Admin for Charlotte Harbor Young Life, I have been witness to a number of transformations - from stories told at the annual Gala to kids coming to know Christ in a time of socially distant ministry. But through all these things, one constant has remained, central focus on the ministry God has bestowed onto us. It is here at the Mall Center that has given me the opportunity to see God work

on all levels when a ministry follows His lead.

If you would like to learn more about volunteering your time, experience, cooking skills or more, please come by our Center in the mall. We have office hours Monday-Friday, 10AM-3PM. Kids begin arriving after school around 2:15PM. As I reflect on the last 12 months of my life, I am amazed at the journey God

put me on 20 years ago, bringing me to Port Charlotte, making Christ the center of my life and my family's lives, and providing a place at Charlotte Harbor Young Life to flex the skills He blessed me to perform. It is my prayer for all to experience a transformation in their lives. I have just one question...what does He have in store for you?

## Area Admin

### David Kohler





# THE MALL MINISTRY

At the Young Life Mall Center, Young Life staff and Board members hangout with High School and Middle School students every weekday from 2:00pm to 7:00pm. Most come right over after school ends from PCHS and play games, eat a hot meal and have an awesome time together creating bonds. Our goal is to be there in every aspect of these kids' lives because we can all agree that we never really know what someone is going through until we get to know them.

New Staff member Antonio Vargo says "I earn the right to step into their lives and minister to them and assurance that they now have someone that cares for them and loves them just as Jesus cares and loves for us.

Since starting in my job I've met so many kids and have been fortunate enough to create strong bonds with many of them. The ministering part tends to be difficult when you're trying to reach kids that want nothing to do with church. In fact I've had some kids tell me that they "hate God", "hate the rules of the Bible", and "think it's a cult". Hearing those reactions kind of scared me at first. I thought to myself, "how am I supposed to minister to kids who just gave me answers like that?" I started off just praying about the kids and asking God to help me lead these kids to Him. I think the best way I've been able to reach them is showing them love like Christ has loved me. We as christians are called to love God and love people. Now, a couple of months down the road, I have been taking some of those kids with me to youth group on Wednesdays. Every Wednesday, my friends Adam, Butler, Matthew and Robert all pile up in my car and go to youth group. Now the crazy part of this story is those negative reactions came from three of the kids that I take with me to youth group every week! My friend Adam that



TEENS COMING IN FOR A FREE HOT MEAL AND PLAYING FOOSBALL

"hates God" and wants nothing to do with church now tells me his favorite day of the week is Wednesday. Every time we leave youth group, he tells me how it's the most fun he's ever had in his entire life. My friend Butler who said he "hates the rules of the Bible" now has open conversations with my youth pastor and I every Wednesday when we go out to eat after youth group. My friend Robert who "thinks it's a cult" is also involved in open discussions about scripture and listens to the breakdowns of what some verses mean.

The version of me that was scared by the kids reactions I first received, now has no fear for answers because our God is an awesome God and there is no heart that He can't reach. I also tell you these stories to show that just by

being an available friend and hanging out with these kids, I have been able to create Christ-like bonds with them. I was able to do all of that just by showing them the love that Christ showed me. I am extremely grateful for all of the opportunities that have been presented to me from God through Young Life"





## LEMON BAY HIGH

Francesca was involved in Wyldlife during her Middle School years. She is now a freshman at Lemon Bay High School and is excited to have community within Young Life. In her own life, she is trying to navigate high school and find her place. Recently, she talked with her Young Life leader about what it means to be a believer and what are the next steps in her relationship with Jesus. We are excited to walk with her through High School and help her understand what it means to follow Jesus and be loved by Him.



Abby started with Young Life last year as a freshman and her brother a senior. Her faith grew during the

beginning months of COVID-19 when she felt alone, separated from her classmates and friends. Abby clung to Jesus and has continued in her walk with him.

Simultaneously, her brother took steps closer to Jesus. This school year, Abby has welcomed her friends to Young Life and Bible study at her house, inviting them to consider this Jesus she follows. She often posts encouraging Bible verses on her Instagram and is currently looking for a local church to get connected to.

This is the first year Megan got involved with Young Life. As a senior, she started attending campaigners, our



weekly Bible study. One of her previous classmates passed away and she was able to have a space to process what was going on. Slowly, she has opened up about what her world looks like. She is excited each week to attend campaigners Bible study and is open to hearing about Jesus. We're excited for her to continue to make it her own before she heads off to college after graduation!







## CHARLOTTE HIGH

"Hi my name is Emma and my story's a little different than other Young Life students. I actually grew up in the church. My mom was the children's minister and my dad was the youth pastor. I've always known who God is and been around good Christian people."

"But Young Life isn't only for students who've never met God. Young Life is also for people like me who are growing in their faith. I met Jenn (my Young Life leader) in middle school. Once I got involved in high school I found out that Young Life is an environment for me to dig deeper into my faith and ask questions about God." "Through Young Life, I've met some amazing people like Ivy and Carlos and I've gotten to grow with them in our faith. Now I help in the middle school Wyldlife and I help those kids grow in THEIR faith and even help some of them meet God for the very first time."

Jenn Candia - Staff Assoc.



## PORT CHARLOTTE HIGH

I met Chloe about two years ago now. We got to go to summer camp together and through the week really got to build a relationship through not only conversations but the many incredible things we did at YoungLife camp like horseback riding! I've gotten to see her growth these past two years and got to see how Young Life was at first an after school event to attend, and now is a place where she found community! When asked what Young Life has meant to her, Chloe shared "YoungLife has impacted me by bringing me closer to God and having him guide me through my life. Before YoungLife I felt lost and my leaders

have helped me gain trust in God. I have developed a healthy relationship with Christ and feel more complete. My leaders like Joanna have left a huge impact on my life. Not only did they help me get closer to God, but they are always there for me when I need them. I can always come to them with questions or concerns and they do anything to help me. I'm so glad God brought me to YoungLife because I honestly don't know where I'd be without it." Getting to do life with Chloe, celebrate her wins, walk with her through her losses, pray with her, answer questions, and see her grow is such a honor and privilege; It's relationships like this one that really reflect what YoungLife is all about! Building relationships with our high school friends and being able to talk to them and point them to Jesus! From Joanna -Team Leader at PCHS





## MIDDLE SCHOOL MINISTRY L.A. AINGER AND SKY ACADEMY

64% of people that are saved, commit to Christ before the 18th Birthday.

We first met Grace in the jungle of the L.A. Ainger Middle School cafeteria. In the sea of new sixth grade faces, she walked up to us and invited us over to her table. She stole our hearts right from that moment, and we have loved getting to know her.

Fast forward to eighth grade fall weekend camp, Grace really opened up about what's been going on in her life, even sharing the pain of losing her dad

to drugs and her dog the weekend right after that. Coming back home gave us a chance to walk with her through the process of grief and to encourage her in her faith to draw closer to Jesus. Although, Grace accepted the Lord as a child, she struggles to walk with Him.

During one of our campaigner groups, we were able to give her a Bible and now she tells me she looks forward to

reading different verses out of the book of John (her favorite so far).

Grace is always inviting new friends to our events and activities. We look forward to encouraging her in sharing her faith too! Later this month, Grace will be getting baptized.

“lead her closer to saying yes to Jesus

## GREAT LEADERS CARING FOR GREAT KIDS

Emily is a sixth grader at Sky Academy. During school lunch, her Wyldlife leaders met her sitting by herself. They learned about her love for snacking and how she just started school in person after being online for months. Soon after, Emily attended her first Club after school. There she connected with her peers and heard about Jesus from her leaders, although she was a little shy.

She also heard fall weekend camp was coming up and her mom called to find out more details. Emily almost backed out of camp since she didn't have any friends going. But we are so glad she went and her mom trusted her to go with us!

Emily was such a joy to have at camp. She was so eager to try new things and make new friends. During cabin time, she was a main contributor and shared about how little she knew of Jesus. She asked lots of questions and by the end of the weekend, decided she wanted to know more of who He is to her. As leaders, we are looking forward to

having more opportunities to grow Emily's faith and lead her closer to saying yes to Jesus. Emily continues to come to Wyldlife after camp. She is confident and connects well with leaders, always offering to help out.





## PUNTA GORDA MIDDLE

This is my friend Hannah. She is in the 7th grade at PGMS. Hannah loves basketball and is at Wyldlife every week. This fall Hannah came with us to camp where I got to know her a lot better. Her mom and dad are not together and she goes between the two houses. Hannah has a good relationship with her dad but tends to have a harder time with her mom. Last week, we talked about math and how we can work on getting her grades up so she can get back on the basketball team. Hannah has a good relationship with her Wyldlife high school leaders, Emma and Ivelisse. She is always texting them and asks

them for advice on all kinds of things (including boys.) In recent conversations with her, she shared she's still not quite sure where she stands with God. She is a little more open to the possibility of God than before and she might even call herself agnostic. Please keep her and our leaders in prayer as we walk with Hannah through life.



“Over 12,000 plus students in Middle and High School in our area. Less than 10% are hearing about Jesus”



As we move into the 2021-2022 school year, we are not satisfied with 90% of teens never hearing about Jesus or being plugged into church. So we have chosen to trust Jesus and pursue a full-time Staff person to help us reach students in the city of North Port.

We are looking for local businesses and families that want to see Young Life in the community of North Port. Would you commit to pray for people that you could introduce to us and help us make connections? Our annual budget needs to increase by \$50,000 to accomplish this goal. We are praying we can find 50 FIRST TIME GIVERS from the North Port area that would give \$88 a month to help us meet that need.



### Since this is our Gala Letter would you consider...

This is our replacement for our annual Gala we are asking you to consider giving a monthly gift to Charlotte Harbor Young Life, to continue your current gift or increase it. Several People stopped giving this year due to uncertain times. The only thing **I am certain of, is there is no better time than now to reach teens for Jesus.**

We believe that God will lead those to give as he wants to use them to increase our support to reach more students in Charlotte County and North Port.

Thanks so much - Giving options on Back.



# Young Life

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