



Anchor Youth Ministry
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Dear Anchor Youth Ministry Families,

We are excited to welcome your incoming 6th Graders to Anchor Youth Ministry. This is Zeke Mientkiewicz Coordinator of Middle School Youth Ministry at Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Cecilia Parishes and Phil Stone Director of Evangelization and Faith Formation at Saint Thomas Aquinas. We know that your family is about to experience the wonderful and chaotic phase of life that is middle school. Perhaps, you're surprised that this day has come, and it seems like yesterday that your child received his or her First Communion. Perhaps, this has been a long time coming! But whether you are going to Ames, Gilbert, Ballard or are Homeschooling, we're excited to welcome your child into the Anchor Youth Ministry family and to give you an introduction to our programs and our leaders.

To begin, Anchor Youth Ministry has a variety of programs that we'd like to share with you. First on the list is our exciting combination of summer programs. Whether your child likes camping, cooking, or serving others, we have something to offer you. Please check the attached calendar for more details.

Starting next September, your child is also invited to attend EDGE, our middle school youth group. At EDGE youth gather to play all sorts of zany games, hear the teaching of Jesus proclaimed, reflect on their lives in discussion groups, and are sent with a challenge to grow in their faith. EDGE meets on the first Wednesday of the month, and on the second and fourth Sundays.

In addition, our Middle School Small Groups will kick off next September. Small groups meet at St. Cecilia school on Wednesday evenings from 7:30 to 8:45 PM and are broken into three parts. The first part focuses on building community and having fun for its own sake, anchoring your child in our Catholic Communities. The second part explores the teaching of the church by walking through the Bible, using a youth-friendly study that explore connections between the stories and our lives. By looking at these passages, we hope to help your child gain a better understanding of how their faith connects to every part of their life: from their identity as God's beloved child, to the ways we support our community. Finally, the last part dives into offering «Student_First» a practical experience of prayer that they take an active role in. In addition to teaching classics like the Rosary, *Lectio Divinia*, and the Divine Mercy Chaplet, we'll present prayer as a personal conversation through opportunities to journal, create, and reflect on music, literature, and sacred art.

Some of you may know that this is a change from our programming last year, which was a “textbook” based and borrowed heavily from traditional classroom models. We moved to a small group model to better serve the needs of your children. Instead of merely *presenting* information to be retained we want to spark conversation that helps your child to think critically and use the resources that the church offers to make good decisions. In addition, we want to move from the concept that Christianity is not just a set of ideas, but a *lived relationship* with Christ and his Church. Wednesday, August 24th at 6:00 PM and on Wednesday, September 14th following the First Class Mass (~7:00 PM).

We know that raising a family is hard right now, especially when you are being asked to chauffeur your children from place to place all night long. To help you logistically we'll also offer Open Gym on Wednesdays at 6:45 to 7:30 PM so you can have the option of dropping your child off early. During this time, students are welcome to work on homework, play games, shoot hoops, or just hang out with the small group leaders. We hope this gives you some flexibility in your busy schedules and offers a place to relax, socialize, and make new friends.

Finally, we have one more question for you: does this sound interesting to you or someone you know? If so, we have several openings for small group leaders, assistants, and support staff. Just contact Phil or Zeke and we would *love* to tell you more and help you determine if this ministry is a good fit for you. If you're worried about having all the right skills or knowing enough theology, please know that we have prepared the tools and materials you'll need to keep things **simple and easy** to run.

Thank you so much for your time and we hope you have a blessed day. Thank you as well for showing your children God's love. We know being a parent isn't easy, especially when one of your children is in the roller coaster of middle school. We greatly respect and appreciate all the hard work you do to help your children become the amazing people that they are! May God bless you and your family abundantly and we look forward to seeing you soon

Sincerely

Zeke and Phil.

Zeke



Zeke organizes Middle School Youth Ministry at St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Cecilia's. Zeke grew up in a Navy family moving from Virginia to California before eventually settling near Buffalo, NY. He attended Houghton college and majored in Humanities and Writing. After college, Zeke worked for several Catholic schools and camps before becoming a Youth Ministry Coordinator. He and his wife Kristin have a two-year old named Grant who they enjoy playing and exploring with. When Grant is napping, Zeke runs, plays tabletop games, and practices optimism by rooting for the Buffalo Bills.

Phil



My wife Suzee and I have been married for 15 years and have been blessed with 3 sons: Joseph, Adrian, and Maximilian. Suzee and I both grew up here in central Iowa and consider the Ames/Des Moines area home. We both had various connections to ISU and STA growing up and started dating after going on an STA mission trip to Williamsburg, KY together in 2004. I am a 2006 graduate of Benedictine College with a B.A. in Theology and Philosophy. My ministry experience began with spending a year doing Youth Ministry in Belize post-graduation. After getting married, I taught high school Theology at Dowling Catholic, served for 7 years on campus with FOCUS at both UMD and MNSU in Minnesota, and then went on to raise funds for the St. Thomas More Newman Center in Mankato.

My family and I are very happy to be "back home" in central Iowa since 2009 and to serving the Ames area families, along with great priests and co-workers like Zeke!