



# ELEMENT STUDENT MINISTRY

Dear Element Family,

I am so thrilled for this next school year and to see how God will continue to shape the lives of our students and community. For 15 years now, our goal has been to partner with families in supporting the growth of student relationships with Christ that will continue to grow throughout their lives.

Each year, we seek to listen and discern from students, parents and other youth ministry experts around the country for how we can best live out this goal. Increasingly over the past five years, stress and anxiety levels amongst students 11-18 have skyrocketed, well past acceptable levels and well-past levels of adults 25 and older. Students 11-18 are the most anxious and stressed people in our country. The Pew Research Center states, "Anxiety and depression are on the rise among America's youth and, whether they personally suffer from these conditions or not, 7-in-10 teens today see them as major problems among their peers. Concern about mental health cuts across gender, racial and socio-economic lines, with roughly equal shares of teens across demographic groups saying it is a significant issue in their community." According to a 2018 A.P.A. study on Generation Z and stress, "teens reported worse mental health and higher levels of anxiety and depression than all other age groups."

In the past four years, when students at Element are given the opportunity to vote and submit the topics they wish to cover on Sunday nights and small groups, over 85% of our students list "stress and anxiety." No other topic comes close. I recognize that this is not news to many of you. For youth pastors who desire for students to live into their most authentic selves, this is heartbreaking news and has led to some serious conversations in youth ministry broadly and specifically here at Element.

With this in mind and with our continued goal to partner with families (and to never become a place that perpetuates stress and anxiety), we will be making some major shifts in our weekly programming in the coming school year. These changes are in the hope that Element will be and continue to grow as a place where students feel safe, known, loved, and cared for. It is our goal and passion to help Element become a place where relational youth ministry is our priority and focus.

## 1) Sunday Nights

### ➔ ONE NIGHT (8/25, 9/22, 10/27, 11/17, 12/8, 1/12, 2/9, 4/19, 5/17)

ONE NIGHT is the CAN'T MISS Sunday at Element each month. Once a month, our entire student ministry will gather together for a high-energy, fun-filled night that involves dinner, worship, videos, skits and a message from our staff or a guest speaker. Many of our students participate in leading ONE NIGHT, making this a great opportunity to bring a friend to church. Both before and following the ONE NIGHT worship time, there are optional pre/post service activities that will allow students to hangout with and connect to other students, our youth team and volunteers. These events can include activities on or off campus. Times and locations will be updated at the start of each month in our weekly email, our social media and website.



# ELEMENT STUDENT MINISTRY

## ➔ **CONNECT SUNDAYS**

CONNECT SUNDAYS are open to any student throughout the school year (except for ONE NIGHT weeks). On CONNECT Sundays, Element staff will provide a variety of different activities ranging from frisbee in the park to Theology 101. Each month we will release that month's list of CONNECT activities. These Sundays are very accessible but also give room for students to ensure they are taking Sabbath seriously in their lives. We do not expect students to attend every activity in a given Sunday, nor every CONNECT Sunday. Our hope is that CONNECT will provide relational opportunities for students and staff alike, and help them grow in their faith through intentional fellowship.

## **2) Cancelling Prayer Breakfast**

Prayer Breakfast has been a consistent part of Element Student Ministry since 2008 and has been a wonderful opportunity for students and Element staff to gather once a week before the stress of the school day starts. Similar to the aforementioned statistics, Prayer Breakfast has since become another obligation for students. We are grateful for the students who have committed to Prayer Breakfast, and for those who have boldly shared about their faith with those who show up every week. We hope to continue student discipleship in the other programs of our ministry, such as FUSION and Element AM.

## **3) FUSION Group Expansion**

In contrast and response to continued levels of stress, we have seen a dramatic increase in our FUSION groups, both spiritually and numerically. It is clearer than ever that students desire to be known, loved and connected to God though a small and intimate setting of peers and caring adult leaders who covenant to walk alongside them each and every day. FUSION Groups have always been about giving students spaces to foster intentional community with peers of their same age and gender, that are flexible enough to fit their busy schedules, which is why we have never tied FUSION groups to meeting on a certain day or certain place. We want FUSION groups to be accessible to every student because we believe lives are changed when lived within intentional, uplifting, and supportive communities. Over the next three years, we plan to expand our group offerings to over 40 different groups, creating space for EVERY student to participate. PARENTS - WE NEED YOU - either as leaders, coordinators of groups or to recruit other caring adult leaders who you believe have a passion for students and discipleship. You can contact myself or Emily Willson, our director of discipleship, to find ways to partner in this important program.

My prayer for this next year is for space. Space for students to be themselves, space to better connect with you and with each other and most of all, with God. As we partner with students and families this year, we hope that our changes in 2019-2020 will provide this space and better opportunities for each of our students to be known, loved and connected to God through our ministry.

In Christ,

Rev. Robert Sturdivant  
Minister to Students  
Trinity United Methodist Church  
[www.elementstudentministry.com](http://www.elementstudentministry.com)