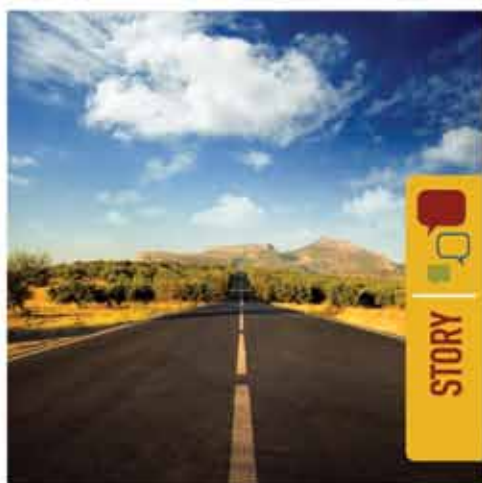
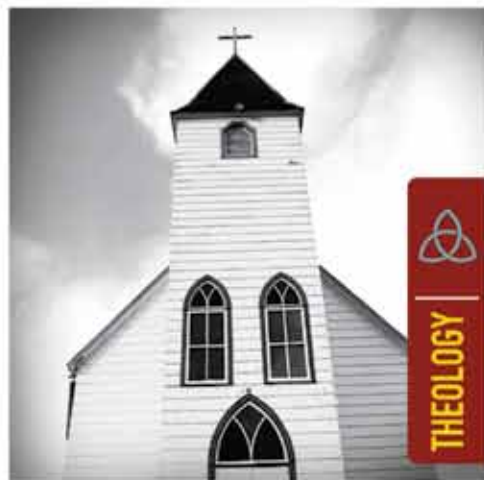


PREVIEW ISSUE

IMMERSE

A JOURNAL OF FAITH, LIFE AND YOUTH MINISTRY



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SO, HERE WE GO... announcing a BIG makeover – from *The Journal of Student Ministries* into *Immerse: A Journal of Faith, Life and Youth Ministry*. This might prompt you to inquire, “Is this one of those 30 minute makeovers you see on a network morning talk show featuring willing subjects who mostly need an updated hairstyle and wardrobe help or will this be a “makeover” in the vein of Extreme Makeover: Home Edition in which Ty and team tear down and start over to create something that inspires and astonishes those involved?” Wow, great question. Of course we hope that we will be nurturing something that will expand the scope and imagination of what a youth ministry journal could truly be about. We have a passionate desire to offer a robust, holistic, earthy view of youth ministry by embracing all of life. We don’t want to engage with the vocation of youth ministry bound by a few categories such as “full, part-time or volunteer youth workers”; “Middle School, High School or College Youth Work”; or “good culture vs. bad culture and ‘our formula’ for deciding what’s good and bad.” We want to engage the entirety of life through the context of youth ministry, not only issues of spiritual formation, theology, church, praxis, sociology, but also the arts, justice, culture, relationships, beauty, the environment, science, plus much more in pursuit of LIFE to the FULL. It is our desire to nurture an environment through the *Immerse* journal that creates the space to:

- Move conversations
- Fire our Imagination
- Make Culture
- Shape Ecclesiology
- Reframe Praxis
- Engage in Deep Theological Reflection
- Lean into God’s future with a respect for our past
- Question Assumptions
- Maintain Civility in the midst of Diversity

I believe that youth workers must engage in youth ministry out of the fullness of her/his life with God. Jesus Christ makes an astounding offer of life to the full. Let’s nurture our souls to be the people God created us to be and live life to the full. Let’s immerse ourselves deeply in this Christ shaped life, curious to learn and always open to be astonished by our Great God.



Mike is in his 35th year in youth ministry and serves as President/CEO of Youthfront. Youthfront is a community committed to creating holistic, missional environments for Christian formation. Mike also serves as the Executive Editor of *Immerse: A Journal of Faith, Life and Youth Ministry*, is an Elder in his church, serves on several boards and is an adjunct Professor at Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City. His current book is *Presence Centered Youth Ministry: Guiding Students into Spiritual Formation* (InterVarsity Press). Mike and his wife, Vicki, live in Blue Springs, Missouri, a suburb of Kansas City. They have two sons, a daughter, a daughter-in-law, a son-in-law and a granddaughter.

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ARTICLES

Each issue will feature topics from these individual categories

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others is what spiritual formation is all about. Through yielding to the Holy Spirit, deep Christian thought, social action and ongoing participation in a faith community committed to spiritual disciplines, each of us has the opportunity to grow in our relationships with God, self, others and the world. The articles found in this section will be reserved for all things related to being formed spiritually as well as the elements and environments necessary for shaping the lives of those we minister to and with.

THEOLOGY

Youth ministry is a theological endeavor, no doubt. Theology, in a very basic sense, is the language, or terms and meanings, that we give in order to make sense of God. Youth ministry isn't just about the language or the intellectual aspects of theology, however. Youth ministry ought to be equally concerned with the practical aspects of theology. Therefore, theology as it expressly relates to youth ministry is not merely about giving students information about God but helping them live out the intended ways of God. The articles found in this section will help those who work with youth to develop their own theology as well as discover the best ways to introduce and indoctrinate students to practical theology.

STORY

The gospel is the story of God's redemptive activity throughout all of humanity—from the beginning to the new beginning. The gospel is to be proclaimed and performed, and neglecting one or the other of these two inseparable aspects makes the gospel irrelevant and hollow. The gospel and the kingdom life it represents are the central message of the person and work of Jesus. This message of incarnational living is about salvation and justice. The story of the gospel must be made relevant and genuine. The articles found in this section of our journal will deal implicitly and explicitly with the gospel and the modern-day stories of God's will, way and work of providing salvation and justice through Jesus for all of humanity.

ARTS & CULTURE

Humans are created in the image of God. As image bearers, we reflect the very nature of God when we create and appreciate creation. This reflection is a part of living into who we are made to be as humans. The arts can be defined as anything created in the hopes of elevating people's perception beyond the realms of reason and logic and into that of the abstract divine. Culture is the act of adding to and molding of what has already been created. The arts and culture in general speak to the beauty of God in a way that is transcendent of words. Those who follow Christ should be at the forefront of creating and appreciating the arts and culture. The articles in this section will help guide youth workers to a greater awareness and appreciation of others' abilities and their own talents and gifts as the *Imago Dei*, as well as encourage the expression of those gifts in everyday life.

LEADERSHIP

So much of youth ministry is leadership development. Discovering future leaders and helping them grow in their abilities to influence and guide others is critical to the future of the church. Along with that, leading those we work alongside of in our efforts to guide students into spiritual formation for the mission of God is a never-ending but joyful responsibility. And we would be foolish if we weren't consistently trying to find ways to improve our own leadership abilities and gifts. The articles found in this section are designed to help you in your quest to develop emerging leaders.

CHURCH

We all know that we don't go to church; we are the church. The church is a people. Therefore, the church is a community of people both gathered locally and scattered globally that exists to carry out the work of the mission of God. God's mission is to restore the world to its intended wholeness, and we the church have the remarkable privilege of finding where God is at work and joining him there. The church is always converting and being converted. The church is the express agency of the gospel or of kingdom living. The church is the manifestation of Jesus here on earth. The articles found in this section of our journal will focus on matters of ecclesiology and the missional nature of its existence.

ADVISORY BOARD



JAMES K. HAMPTON, PHD

Professor of Youth Ministry
School of Practical Theology
Asbury Theological Seminary
Wilmore, KY

Youth ministry magazines are a dime a dozen. Most offer some variation of the following: two to three articles on some youth ministry theme, one to two articles offering practical advice on handling a youth ministry issue and reviews of youth ministry resources.

Immerse is different. It does focus on youth ministry, but it recognizes that neither youth nor youth ministry exist in a vacuum. As such, it seeks to expand the conversation, inviting those who work with youth to develop a broader perspective of life, particularly as it applies to youth ministry. Because of this, I heartily endorse *Immerse*.



KENDA CREASY DEAN P.H.D.

Associate Professor of Youth,
Church and Culture Director,
Tennent School of Christian Education
Princeton Theological Seminary,
Princeton, NJ

Immerse marks a turning point in youth ministry. Youth ministry has grown into a new kind of conversation, a broader form of ministry, a church-changing and church-challenging forum where thoughtful people grapple with issues raised by God's mission with young people in an era that will inevitably decouple the "church" from rocks and mortar. *IMMERSE* is poised to become the defining place this conversation happens. I see it as a gathering more than a journal, a "third space" where we wrestle together with how to be the church in the twenty-first century, where we

come together around a shared commitment to stand beside young people in Christ's name whether or not a youth group is involved. It also represents an opportunity to probe beyond the obvious. Youth ministry now has "lifers" leading the field as well as newcomers, careful theologians and thoughtful practitioners, and we are starting to learn from one another. Enough with the swimming lessons, it's time to cast off for deeper waters.



JASON BRIAN SANTOS

PhD Candidate
Princeton Theological Seminary
Princeton, NJ

Over the past decade, we've seen a broader shift in the ethos of youth ministry. Thoughtful practitioners and youth ministry academics began to recognize the need for a more theologically based approach to ministry. The shortcomings of a program-oriented understanding of youth ministry were increasingly recognized. This gradual shift prompted several theologically grounded publications to emerge. Across the board, we've seen a hearty welcome to this shift as evidenced by the reception of books like *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry* and *Presence-Centered Youth Ministry*.

It is my hope that the new *Immerse* journal will address this shift and the deeper theological moorings which have surfaced in the midst of it. The need for a periodical that addresses the current shift is great, to say the least. As a new generation of youth workers comes on the scene, they will no doubt call for a more theologically robust, holistic, culturally sensitive perspective on working with young people. I believe *Immerse* will meet this mandate for a more intentional ministry praxis that marries our more theologically grounded theories to progressive and faithful ministry practices.

I am anticipating *Immerse* to be a reliable resource for youth workers to experiment with new pedagogy, rethink what it means to “form” young people in the faith and create environments that allow for spiritual transformation. In short, it is my deep desire to see *Immerse* help satisfy the spiritual longings that are readily seen in youth ministry today. I look forward to the future of this publication and how it will ultimately help shape youth ministry in America.



ANDREW ROOT, PHD

Assistant Professor,
Youth and Family Ministry
Luther Seminary
St. Paul, MN

If there is a driving force in cultural context, it is the expansion of space. Space is expanding. Anyone can obtain virtual space and start a blog or website. Space is expanding virtually just as it is physically in the universe. But as they multiply, these virtual spaces seem to be getting thinner. The thinness of these spaces means that there are fewer places that challenge us to think deeply by putting us in conversation with others' ideas and fewer ideas that seem to lead us into deep thinking. The thinness of our spaces seems to force us into an echo chamber, where we wonder if anyone is listening or if any other perspective can enter the conversation.

For those of us who care about young people, *Immerse* promises a new space where ideas and distinct perspectives will be welcomed. What you hold in your hands promises to be a thick space, a constant space, a space to think, feel and delve into. In a time of thin virtual space, *Immerse* takes the huge risk of providing us something to hold in our hands that we can sink our teeth into. I couldn't be more excited about the possibility of this new space or more confident

in the people who will be tending it so that it might be hospitable to all. Yet what makes me most excited about this new space is its holistic approach. Youth ministry is an interdisciplinary practice, fundamentally practiced from the core of our shared humanity, and *Immerse* will provide us a rich space where interdisciplinary human practice can be reflected upon in light of God's action in the world. I anticipate great things from this new venture!



MARK OESTREICHER

Author, youth ministry consultant, former
president of Youth Specialties.
San Diego, CA

We're clearly in a time of deep change, and I expect it's likely we will always be from here on out. The dramatic changes in the world around us and the world of teenagers calls on youth workers to re-think assumptions, values, practices, models, roles, goals and theology. What's needed is nothing short of a Youth Ministry Reformation.

The time is seriously ripe for *Immerse*; and I'm hopeful that this journal will become one of our tribal sweat lodges. We need real-life physical spaces for dialogue, experimentation and exploration. But we also need this kind of collaborative trail of breadcrumbs, a printed resource to host and foment reflection and revolution. I, for one, am full of anticipation about journeying together.

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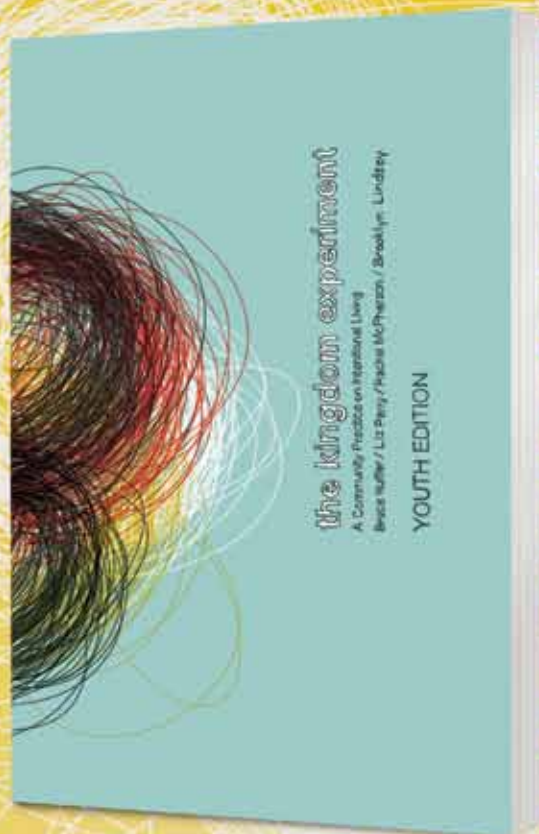
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DOUBT



AS THE

CURRICULUM

FOR CONFIRMATION

ANDREW ROOT, PHD,
Assistant Professor of Youth
and Family Ministry,
Luther Seminary

WE BOARDED THE TRAIN just after midnight, sad to leave behind the breathless beauty of Venice (and the Italian ice cream sandwiches, of which I had already consumed a half dozen). We were on our way to Nice in the south of France for another adventure on twenty dollars a day. My wife having won a fellowship during our final year of seminary, we had chosen to stretch the funds to their extreme by traveling the world.

This particular evening, we hauled our backpacks through the thin aisles of a train until we found our way to our sleeper car. We swung the door open to meet another young couple, also backpackers, from Montreal. After sharing a few travel stories, they asked us what we did back home. We explained that we had just finished seminary and that my wife was preparing to be a pastor and I was going to be an academic theologian. “Cool,” they said in their perfect English with overtones of a French accent. It was the kind of “cool” that said, “That’s surprising and a little weird; I have nothing else to say...sooo...cool.”

After a minute of silence the young woman, realizing we had hours remaining together, said, “I was kicked out of confirmation when I was in school. The leader thought I asked too many disturbing questions, so they asked me to leave.” I must admit that often after a conversation, I think of the perfect thing to say, but this was one of those occasions where it came to me in the moment. I responded, “That’s too bad because the best theologians ask the most disturbing questions.” She just smiled, and we were on to another conversation.

When we finally went to bed that night, I lay in my sleeping bag as southern Europe raced past the window and I thought of the last confirmation class I had taught. I remembered the frustration and pressure. I was frustrated by what felt like bipolar meetings with my ninth-grade small group. It always seemed

that they wanted to talk about anything but the lesson or faith, preferring instead to rehash school gossip or simply make fun of each other until it was impossible to find our way back to the lesson at hand. But at least a few times a year (and this is where it gets bipolar), the conversation would turn from gossip and mayhem to the deepest and most difficult of questions. Right in the middle of my trying to steer things back on topic and telling someone to stop throwing popcorn, one of them would drop the biggest of theological questions on me. One minute I would be fighting to get them to talk about anything having to do with what I supposed was our reason for being together, throwing out comments like, “So in reading this Bible passage, what jumps out to you?”

Then the next minute I’d be suddenly cornered with something like, “So if God is so powerful and loving, why are children in poor countries dying every minute? And why did my mom’s friend who just had a baby get leukemia?”

This back and forth made my head spin; what was I doing? I felt like half the time I was taskmaster-teacher, and the other half I was bumbling defender of the faith, not feeling prepared or adequate to address these significant questions (and I was a seminary student at the time). So what was I doing as a confirmation leader? Was I to be a teacher, a defender, a mixture of both?

The truth is, when it comes to preparing adults to be confirmation teachers and mentors for students, we often don’t know what they are doing, which of course means, that if we—the paid youth workers—don’t know, then surely the volunteer has no clue. We know that they’re supposed to help pass on the essentials of the Christian faith and tradition to young people, but they’re also supposed to be in deep relationship with them. These desires seem to conflict. The volunteer is given a packet of lessons

Then the responsibility of the confirmation teacher is not to know the tradition in an airtight way, something few to zero volunteers can sign off on, but only to be open enough with young people to explore one’s own doubts as he or she explores the young peoples’.

and told to get through them as well as help kids write faith statements and memorize Bible verses. And of course, while you're doing all this essential stuff—stuff that determines whether they can be confirmed at all—don't forget to build deep relationships with them.

But maybe this conflicted way of being confirmation leader is not the best approach; perhaps there is another way. Often we see the confirmation leader as the one responsible for getting kids to know and appropriate the tradition through deep relationship. But what if the objective of the confirmation teacher was not to work to pass on anything but was rather to be a partner and companion in doubt?

What if, instead of depending on lessons bought from publishing houses, we used our very doubts as the curriculum for passing on the faith? Or to say it another way, what if the best way to actually pass on the faith was not through lessons, certainty, and knowledge but through doubt? What if the confirmation teacher was a convincer and co-doubter with adolescents? What if confirmation wasn't about appropriating a tradition but exploring doubt, placing it on the table and fiercely seeking understanding through it?

Then the responsibility of the confirmation teacher is not to know the tradition in an airtight way, something few to zero volunteers can sign off on, but only to be open enough with young people to explore one's own doubts as he or she explores the young peoples'. What energy a small group could have if for three years—or three weeks—they sought to express the depth of their unbelief, working to share it with each other and God! The confirmation teacher then is no longer taskmaster-teacher or skilled apologist with defense for all adolescent questions but is the captain of the company of companion doubters. Confirmation would be the time to ask your most disturbing questions about God, self, and world, to place them on the table as the group's shared curriculum.

You may be starting to get nervous (I must admit, my own stomach quivers a little as I write this). But our shared nervousness has more to do with misunderstandings than with reality. We wrongly think that doubt is a Trojan horse that, if allowed to penetrate the fortress of our person, will release an army that will undercut our faith and lead us far away from God. But I think this is because we wrongly assume that faith is only faith if it has been immunized from doubt. Yet doubt is not antithetical to faith; doubt is the call to faith.

We may not admit it, but we fear that if we allow kids to doubt (even more so, if we encourage it!), then they will discover that our faith is only a house of cards that cannot stand up to the winds of their inquiries.



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A good confirmation teacher, then, is not someone who knows every answer. It is someone who can create an environment where people feel safe enough to speak their deepest doubts into the life of the group, to speak those doubts and then seek God in them. The job of the confirmation leader is to invite doubts to be spilled without fear of shock or dehumanizing judgment from others.



Protestant theology, from the early Reformation, sought to do theology by discussing the negative or the opposite (the *via negativa*). The theologians of the early Reformation believed that it was only by examining the opposite that we could be freed from seeing our common theological language as just that—common; as meaningless phrases plastered on greeting cards that now have no meaning at all. We get back the rich (earth-shaking) meaning by thinking together of these realities in light of their opposite.

So when Paul says that discipleship is encompassed in faith, hope, and love, these are not just nice, flowery words perfect for church mission statements and Christian college insignias. They are radical assertions in light of their opposites. We are to love others in opposition to the will to dominate them; we are to hope in opposite immediacy; we are to have faith in opposition to certainty. The call to faith is the call to avoid the temptation of certainty; it is certainty, not doubt, that destroys faith.

And right here is where we usually go wrong with confirmation. Christianity has nothing to do with certainty, and confirmation is not the ritual of claiming that you will with all certainty believe the tradition and theology of the church. Rather, Christianity is about living in opposition to certainty; it is about faith in the midst of doubt. Christianity has no room

for certainty, for certainty lives by the law of self-protection; its own rightness keeps it from hope, and most importantly (the greatest of these, Paul says), love. Certainty demands its rightness in the now, even if it means hurting or hating others to maintain its integrity.

Doubt then is not our enemy but our great friend. For it keeps us from the most un-Christian of things: assuming that we possess certainty, that we need not think our faith, love our neighbors, and worse—that we need not search for God, for we know this God certainly. Faith that has become certain is no longer (by definition) faith; it has become idolatry. We are no longer seeking out a living, personal God but have made this God into a frozen idol.

The truth is, there can be no relationship at all when it is based on certainty. I cannot really love my friend and embrace the fullness of his being if I assume I know him with certainty, if in being with him I keep saying, “I know you; that’s not what you think. I don’t need to hear you, see you, or learn from you. I know you certainly; you cannot change.” Faith is about trust. And for trust to be trust, it must always live with doubt. So I say, let us doubt! Let us make confirmation the place of shared doubt. For it is only when we welcome doubt that we are really the people who are about faith seeking understand-

ing (which the church father Anselm called us to be).

What the confirmation leader would have to affirm is that the Christian tradition has something to say to our questions. It has something to say to our deep doubt that is worth exploring. She or he would have to commit to affirming that the tradition has something to say, not commit to knowing it perfectly or even accepting it fully. It is not important that he or she have the answers, only the willingness to seek God through doubt. This of course takes some bravery, much more bravery than going through a lesson handout. But it is a bravery that is borne in the person of the leader. When the group is built around shared doubt, it is constructed around the core of shared humanity.

Through doubt, the leader is moved not simply to share knowledge or adult wisdom with an adolescent but to share his or her very person, his or her sufferings and longings. A confirmation small group built on the sharing of doubt embraces the mutual openness of relationship. It is a group of place-sharing.

A good confirmation teacher, then, is not someone who knows every answer. It is someone who can create an environment where people feel safe enough to speak their deepest doubts into the life of the group, to speak those doubts and then seek God in them. The job of the confirmation leader is to invite doubts to be spilled without fear of shock or dehumanizing judgment from others. The goal is to make doubt shared, and therefore, part of a community. When our doubts are shared by others, we not only find ourselves squarely in relationship with others, but we discover that our doubts do not alienate us. They invite us to keep searching, to keep seeking for God with these people. We discover that when we cannot believe, others believe for us. And that faith is not a possession or achievement; it is a gift from God.

Confirmation is not the end of a road or a final exam but the welcome and continued encouragement to keep seeking God. The lifeblood of faith seeking understanding is confronting and sharing our doubts with others. If confirmation teachers are co-doubters, conveners of the community of doubt, then they are able to do the two things we often ask of them, the two things that often thrust them into an uncom-

fortable conundrum: they are able to be in deep relationship with young people and, in so doing, explore deeply the tradition. If relationships are built on mutual identification while respecting the other's difference and otherness, then exploring each other's doubts serves as a road to deep connection through mutual exploration (what more can we want?).

Our doubts are usually deeply woven around our beings; we doubt because we have heard that Jesus brings peace, but we have only known the chaos of a drunken father. We've heard that Jesus brings wholeness, but we have only known the emptiness of being out of work. As co-doubters, the small group becomes a deeply woven relational community of shared suffering. But because it has been built around doubt instead of certainty, it is at the same time a group that seeks God, that seeks understanding in the midst of the world's inconsistency, their own inconsistency, and the tradition's inconsistency.

In shared doubt, the broken searching of our shared lives leads us into seeking God, into asking, Who is this God who joins us in our suffering, who comes near in our doubts? Who is this living God who calls us into relationship, who loves us so that our very unbelief and our willingness to proclaim our doubt, (like the father in Mark 9: "I believe, help my unbelief!") becomes the invitation to trust and therefore have faith in the God made known in Jesus Christ?

I wonder what our sleeper car companion would have said had she been in a confirmation class that did not kick her out for asking disturbing questions but made her (and the many other unspoken) doubts the curriculum for their time together? My hunch is that she would have said something like this:

Cool; I went to confirmation. It was one of the most interesting times of my life. I fell in love with those people. We talked about so many crazy, fun, and heart-breaking things. I really saw the depth of the Christian life; I tasted it, and even now I find myself still searching, always asking big questions, always wondering what God is up to, who I am, and what people are dealing with. It was one of the most interesting experiences I've ever had. I discovered life is worth living and God is worth loving.



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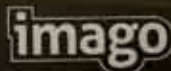
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AS SOON AS I BEGAN INVESTING in the lives of students, adult volunteers and families through the church and more specifically youth ministry, I sought to find relevant and engaging journals and journals that might assist me in my role of guiding students into spiritual formation for the mission of God.

From the very beginning, I have taken advantage of youth ministry magazines and journals to collect innovative ideas, challenge myself with theologically diverse and biblically sound content and to attain new kinds of ministry practices. I have also used each of the publications to become more aware of the tools and resources available in order to most effectively inspire, encourage and equip the leaders around me.

To meet these needs and desires above, I—like many of you—have subscribed to and engaged in helpful magazines such as *Group Magazine*, *The Youthworker Journal*, *The Journal of Student Ministries* and an assortment of other print magazines and journals. Of course, more recently I have supplemented my reading of magazines and journals by engaging with a host of fantastic blogs and online magazines that have also provided me with a surplus of stimulating thoughts and a variety of new kinds of ministry practices.

When the opportunity arose to acquire *The Journal of Student Ministries* and re-launch a new youth ministry journal coupled with an innovative online component, not to mention the chance to collaborate with my good friend Mike King, I just couldn't resist.

I am thrilled that Barefoot Ministries is able to bring you *Immerse: A Journal of Faith, Life and Youth Ministry* in print and online formats. As you engage with *Immerse*, I hope that it will inspire, challenge, encourage and equip you and those whom you work alongside of as you collectively find ways to best guide students into spiritual formation for the mission of God.

As we go along, please be sure to give us your feedback and input. We desire for this journal to be a valued part of your ministry with students, adult leaders and families. One thing I know about youth workers is that they are relentless in their pursuit of discovering the most effective means of guiding students. For that reason, I invite you to help make this journal what you need it to be! Feel free to email contact@immersejournal.com with any questions or feedback you have.



Blessings,

Chris Folmsbee

Chris Folmsbee

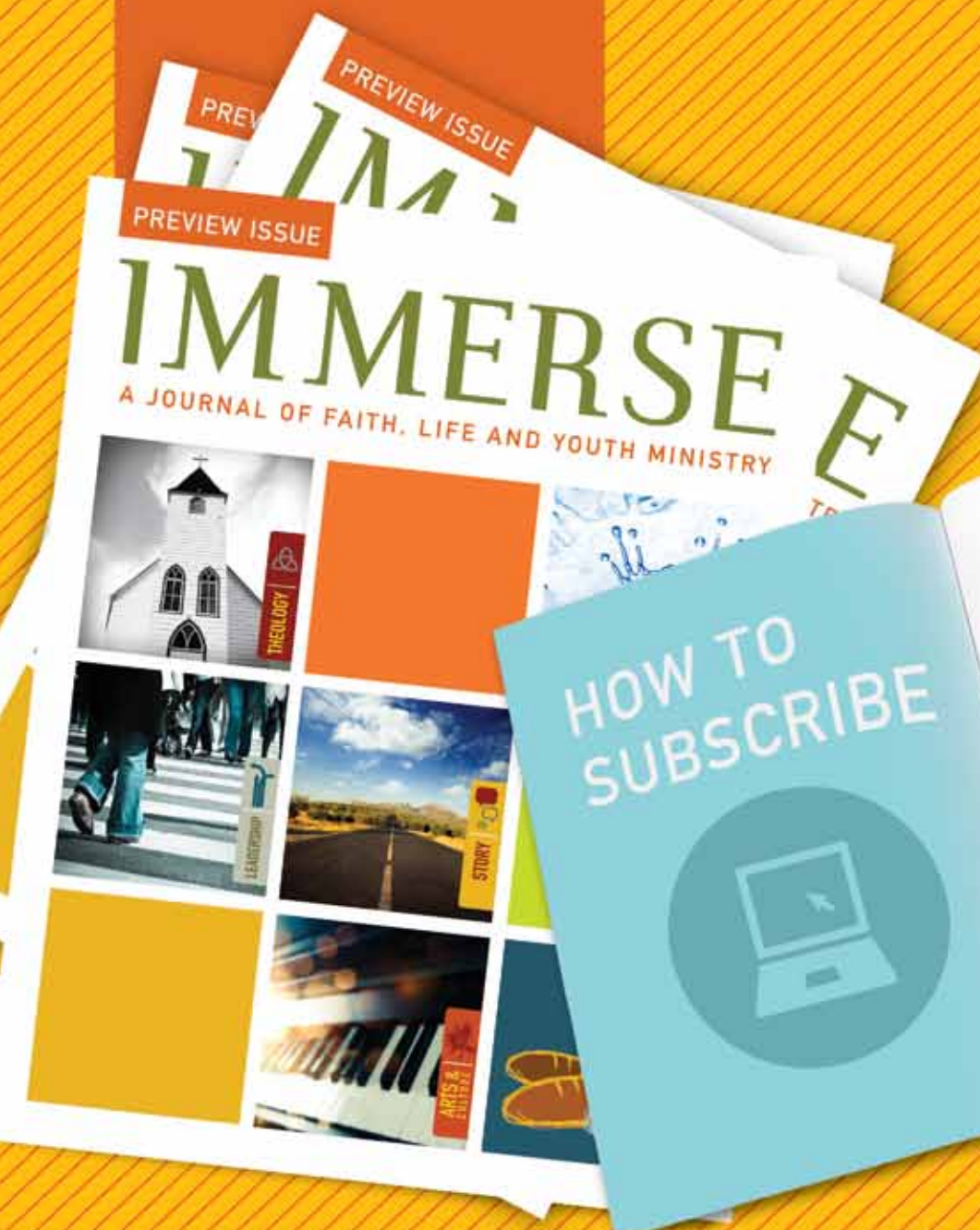
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