

Dear Manchester Youth Parents/Guardians,

This year, Manchester Youth will be covering 5 social topics at Sunday Night Youth Group. Our Youth Team (Beth, Felicia, and Patrick) believe it is important to discuss topics our youth are hearing about outside of church INSIDE church. This is part of the recently-implemented three-year curriculum. Each year, different topics will be presented, and they will be repeated every three years. Some of the topics can be sensitive in nature. Because of their sensitive nature, we want to make sure you are comfortable with your child participating on these nights. Please keep reading for more information about what will be covered on these nights and what options are available.

The topics are listed below by date. The presentation and discussion will follow a strict format that is very similar to a typical youth group. During the large group gathering, information from reliable sources will be presented, as well as any formal stance the United Methodist Church and Manchester UMC has made. During small group time, they will read scripture that discusses the topic. The scripture's socio-historical context will be presented by the discussion leaders. Youth may then share their thoughts or opinions on the topic within the group, and leaders will facilitate the discussion promoting safe boundaries and respectful dialogue within pre-established and reinforced guidelines. **We will also communicate a clear message that all opinions are allowed, welcomed, and respected by everyone, even if they differ from those of the church or denomination.** Beth will follow up with the discussion leaders to address any concerns that may arise.

As with every topic presented during Youth Group throughout the year, the information shared during worship will be appropriate for youth as young as sixth grade. Small group discussions will be tailored to be appropriate to their specific age group.

The topics and dates are as follows:

- Sexual Orientation (January 12)
- Gender Identity (January 19)
- Racism (February 9)
- Poverty (February 16)
- Drugs (February 23)

You may be wondering why we want to present sensitive topics at youth group. We believe the following reasons are important to their discipleship journey as youth:

1. Youth need to learn that church is a safe place to discuss sensitive issues.
2. Youth need to learn that the church has stances and what those stances are.
3. Youth need to learn how to understand these topics through the lens of their faith and make decisions based on this understanding.

Last year, we offered alternative topics for any youth who were not granted permission, but no one opted into these alternatives. The feedback from parents was that they did not want their youth to feel separated from the rest and be resentful towards their parents. Parents instead chose to keep their child home or do another activity as a family that day. As a result, we will not offer an alternative option this year. If you are not comfortable sending your child to Youth Group with the topic scheduled, please feel free to keep them home. (But send them back to us please!)

**IMPORTANT NOTE:**

When the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity topics are presented, we will communicate that Manchester UMC and Manchester Youth affirm all people on the LGBTQ spectrum. This means that we believe they are whole persons who are not expected to change or hide who they are and are eligible for the same rights outside and inside the church as their straight counterparts. We will not require youth to hold the same beliefs, but when youth are present at church activities, they will be expected to treat any LGBTQ people with respect and dignity.

**We understand and respect the decisions you make for your child. We understand that every child is different and may not be ready to tackle a particular issue when it's presented, for whatever reason that may be, and believe that you as the parent are in the best position to make this judgement call.**

Thank you in advance for partnering with me to ensure your child's discipleship is comprehensive, bold, and applicable to their life, while also being appropriate to their developmental readiness. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Yours in Christ,

Beth and the Manchester Youth Team