

I am Chris Huffman, and I was a member of the youth group Pastor Kris Schondelmeyer led at Christ Presbyterian Church in Toledo, OH from my 6th through 11th grade years. Many memories and pivotal moments from those years remain with me, largely because of Pastor Kris. One that stands out most clearly pertains to his remarkable pastoral presence. In particular, his ability to recognize, nurture, and celebrate the strengths of young people.

I had the honor of serving as the Youth Elder of our church during high school, a role that existed only because of Pastor Kris' leadership and vision. Before his arrival, the position did not exist. He was passionate about giving young people a meaningful platform within the congregation that was a place to be heard, to grow in leadership, and to experience God's presence in new and transformative ways. Pastor Kris thoughtfully recommended youth to serve in this role, and for me, it became a launching pad. It strengthened my confidence, deepened my sense of calling, and opened opportunities to engage with the church in ways I never had before.

What makes Pastor Kris extraordinary is that every youth in our church felt this same authenticity from him. They felt his belief in them. He helped each of us uncover our gifts, find our voices, and discover our purpose within the life of the church. While I highlight the Youth Elder position because it shaped my own journey, every young person had their own formative experiences with Pastor Kris. He has an incredibly special ability to uplift individuals while building a unified, close-knit community.

Pastor Kris played an immense role in my life during incredibly transformative years. His leadership style, compassion, relatability, and genuine desire to positively shape the youth of our church and surrounding community left a deep and lasting impact. His influence was so powerful that I nearly redirected my life's career path toward ministry, inspired by him and by God's work through him. Ultimately, I chose medicine, sensing that was where God was calling my gifts. Yet the imprint Pastor Kris left on my life continues to shape the kind of provider I am. I am able to feel and convey greater levels of compassion, empathy, and understanding. Thousands of future patients will continue to benefit from the lessons he placed on my heart. I also plan to participate in medical mission trips through the Presbyterian Church for the remainder of my life, in large part because of his spirit-led leadership.

I have yet to encounter anyone who has moved, guided, and transformed me to the extent that Pastor Kris did during the years he served as my youth pastor. Even eight years later, his impact remains profound. He has a rare and undeniable gift for connecting with others in a way that leaves you feeling heard, cared for, and inspired to continue God's work. I have never met anyone in ministry quite like him.

Chris Huffman
Former CPC-Toledo Youth Group Member, Ruling Elder