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## **Gulf Gate Youth Group Profile**

Gulf Gate Church Youth Group is a dynamic youth group consisting of youth from grades 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup>. We have an interesting mix of churched and un-churched youth. Since our church is in the middle of a neighborhood we attract a large number of un-churched kids from the area that walk or ride to youth group. We have always been an open door youth group accepting everyone who wants to come. Traditionally we have served a light dinner, played games, offered skateboarding, worshipped to live music, delivered a relevant and challenging message, and spent time building relationships with the kids on an individual basis. We try to include several activities through the year including summer youth trips, concerts, fishing, surfing, movie nights and other fun activities. We have a great mix of kids from diverse backgrounds that are eager to learn and respect our point of view.

Over the past few years we have had a large number of un-churched kids accept Christ and become baptized. We feel a need for deeper discipleship of these kids. Our youth group has had as many as 130 kids on a single night. Currently we are reaching around 50 teens. About 15 of these are children of church members that come for Sunday mornings and small groups. At our Wednesday night outreach, we have a completely different group of around 35-50 kids. Our challenge is to bring these two different groups together into a more cohesive ministry. We are hoping to hire a youth pastor who can help us disciple our core students so that they can reach and disciple the outreach kids.

GGC has always emphasized relational youth ministry. The goal has always been to be open and honest with the kids, showing them how to live an authentic faith. Loving the kids without “an agenda” is an important strategy that enables the kids to both hear and experience the message of God’s unconditional grace in Christ. Our youth group is a rare mix of students from all walks of life. Even so, many invite their friends to youth group--not because they truly understand the gospel--but because they sense love and hope. These students are looking to our church and youth group as an extended family. Our desire is to be there for them as a secure place to find love, respect, guidance, and hope in the message of Christ. Currently we have one part-time female staff person and a few very committed adult volunteers who have developed strong relationships with the students through one on one mentoring and small groups.

Our youth group has a strong relationship with Joe Davis, the coordinator of “Allies” the local youth pastor association, who will help our new youth pastor get connected with other youth pastors and youth workers in the area. There is a lot of cooperation amongst the local youth ministry leaders who share a common vision to transform the youth culture in Sarasota. “Nightlife” is a brand new Christian outreach in which many of our students participate. (For more information go to [www.nightlifecenter.com](http://www.nightlifecenter.com) or [www.mobilepreacher.org](http://www.mobilepreacher.org))

Sunny Sarasota offers a variety of creative opportunities when it comes to youth ministry! There are several beaches for fishing, swimming, and surfing. There is a skate park as well as several movie theaters and malls. We are only one hour from Tampa (Busch Gardens & Adventure Island), and just two hours from Orlando (Disney World & Universal Studios). All of these theme parks offer yearly Christian concert events for teens. Sarasota also has lots of coffee houses, cafes, and places to hang out. There is a state park (fishing, airboat rides, and trails), and several local parks with fitness trails, playgrounds, basketball, baseball, volleyball, tennis, etc.... It is easy to find fun things to do in order to build relationships with students!