

# ON THE LEVEL

VOL. 21 ISSUE 2 | SUMMER 2021 | DVULI.ORG

**"I'm  
Listening!"**

**Bwana Clements's  
Dedication to  
Transformational  
Mentoring**

## **OPINION:**

**Jon Coker**

Insists Fatherlessness Is  
No Longer an Excuse

## **BREAKTHROUGH:**

**Korey "XROSS" Dean**

Mans Up in Minneapolis

# HONOR THY VILLAGE

Not too many years ago, NBA All-Star LeBron James posted a note to his unknown father on Instagram. Oddly, James credited his absentee dad for all that he had achieved. “The fuel that I use—you not being there—it’s part of the reason I grew up to become who I am,” writes James.

I can totally relate to James—not because we both grew up in Ohio or grew up without dads or that we both made career moves which meant moving to LA. What I have in common with the 6’9” Lakers shooting guard is (like anyone) our life journeys require some kind of fuel.

That James and I are powered by two completely different fuel brands would be stating the obvious. However, unlike James, the many people who filled the void of my absent father were fuel to me: piano teacher, Gertrude Canty; Sunday school teacher, Mary Napper; youth pastor, Tyus Nedd; journalism professor, Edwin Smith; entertainment mentor, Chris Dawkins; ministry mentors, Floyd and Elaine Flake; character coach, Randy Velt Kamp; life enricher, Rich DeVos; and marathon trainer, Sherwin Ford. I’m fighting back the tears (and likely boring you to tears), attempting to make a point I’m sure you get.

Those names are only a few who comprise my village. They, and many others, were in my life at the right time with the right fuel. Many still are. In this summer issue of *On the Level*, Bwana Clements (Indianapolis 2013), Jon Coker (San Antonio 2017), and Korey Dean (Twin Cities 2018) are braced year-round to fuel the lives of young people who may not only be without a father but without a sure future. Clements, Coker, Dean, and other DVULI alumni are equipped in practicing presence. They’ve accepted the assignment to remain in the lives of those who, like well-known championship ballers, need someone to fill a void.

Summer is here, and it’s the time of year when coaches, camp counselors, and leaders in many fields are in position to instruct and mentor students and youth. I have fond memories of summer as a youth when vacation Bible school, the community swimming pool, and the recreation center were my second summer home. That’s where more members of my village fueled my life’s little achievements. They are “the reason I grew up to become who I am.”

Given all that they imparted, it would be reprehensible for me to post a message honoring an invisible and clueless individual such as my absent father. Perhaps that is one additional quality that James and I don’t have in common... thank God.

Trust the process!

Gerald Bell, Editor (Kansas City 2003)

## Our bad!



The Spring 2021 issue of *On the Level* misspelled “Newark” as “Newmark” in the layout introducing the newest cohort participants. Kudos to the group for embracing the error as a prophetic utterance of the “new mark” they will make in the city of Newark.

*On the Level* is a quarterly publication of the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative (DVULI). All content is property of the DVULI and may not be republished or reproduced without permission. Views and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the DVULI staff, RDV Corporation, or the DeVos Family Foundations.

Contact:  
DVULI  
200 Monroe Ave, NW,  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503  
616-643-4848  
staff@dvuli.org

The DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative is a 501c3, founded in 1998 and made possible by the generous support of the DeVos Family Foundations. © 2021

NEW  
Look & Sound

OUR ACRONYM LOGO



DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative

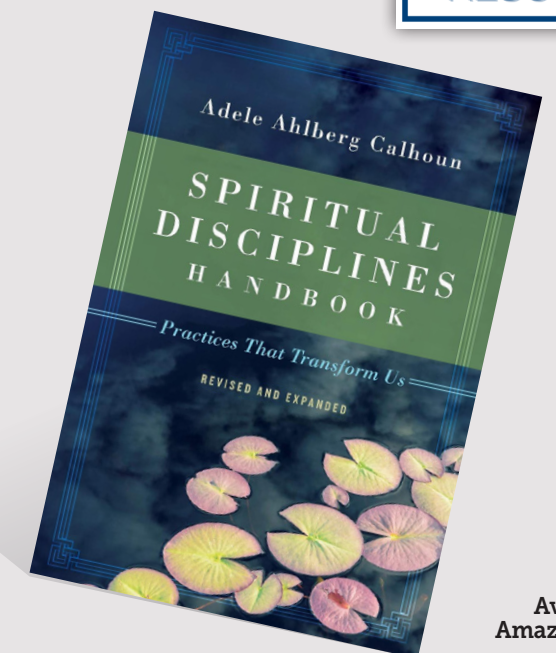
Say it with us, “Deh-VOO-lee.”



## Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us

100% Recommended Resource  
by Angela Reeves (Chicago 2002)

Do you long for a more intimate prayer life or deeper insight from God’s Word? In *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, Adele Ahlberg Calhoun reveals how desire and discipline work together to fulfill one’s longing to be more closely connected to God. For personal devotions or a group-facilitated study, this handbook serves to strengthen the Christ-centered journey that transforms the heart of any believer. Understanding that many become guarded when they hear the word *disciplines*, the author provides step-by-step instructions to help the reader reach the place of quality soul nurturing. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* should be at every leader’s fingertips because it offers a treasure trove of practices no matter where you are in your spiritual journey. I rely on this powerful handbook, and so should you.



Available at  
Amazon Books





For nearly two decades, the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative (DVULI) and Urban Youth Workers Institute (UYWI) have worked side-by-side as two distinct organizations with similar missions and passions. Both organizations have consistently worked hard at preaching and practicing sharing vision, embracing interdependence, and working collaboratively. Many youth workers around the nation share alumni statuses with both programs' training elements. In addition, there are urban leaders and ministers in a host of cities who have been trained by alumni of DVULI or UYWI and are seeing generational impact in the lives of community leaders and the youth they serve.

# Fuel Networks Have Lit and Launched

DVULI and UYWI Elevate Their Longstanding Partnership

By **Gerald Bell** (Kansas City 2003)

The Fuel Network's vision was originally conceived by the UYWI team and extended as a partnership opportunity to DVULI. DVULI staff affirmed that the idea was in alignment with what they have hoped to see develop across the nation. In 2020, 10 pilot cities were identified where youth worker networks were emerging or demonstrating great network potential.

In 2021, Houston-based youth pastor, Will Cumby, hit the ground running after accepting the position of National Fuel Network Director. His role is to help guide each city's network leadership team.

"I love the potential for where this could go," exclaimed Cumby. "We will see greater synergy among cities across the nation and an opportunity for collaborative programming that is necessary in the urban community. I'm super excited about helping leaders build leaders and to share the gift that God has given me on this new and exciting platform."



Will Cumby

Currently, Fuel Network has launched in Cleveland, Ohio; Columbus, Ohio; Houston, Texas; Long Beach, California; Los Angeles, California; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Jersey City, New Jersey; Newark, New Jersey; Queens, New York; and Washington, DC. These 10 cities will maintain a pilot status to allow the Fuel Network model to develop further before additional cities are added.

By deepening the DVULI and UYWI relationship, both hope to encourage, serve, and support existing networks of youth leaders and potentially build new networks where none exist.

"I am deeply excited about our (UYWI) partnership with DVULI and Fuel Network," says Tommy Nixon, CEO at UYWI. "This partnership is such a picture of the kingdom

of God, and I believe we will be more impactful together in seeing healthy urban leaders who have the training and resources to lead young people to Christ."

The partnership already has five of the Fuel Network cities beta-testing a week-long entrepreneurial training for teens. Small seed grants and other budget items are being shared between DVULI and UYWI to fund the delivery of the training for up to 30 youth per city.

"DVULI and UYWI have been partners for a long time," reflects Nixon. "But to see the partnership flourish at such a time as this is inspiring." To learn more, go to [FuelNetworkPartners.org](https://FuelNetworkPartners.org).

**FUEL**  
NETWORKS

**U** URBAN  
YOUTH WORKERS  
INSTITUTE

**DVULI**

**ENCOURAGING &  
EMPOWERING LEADERS**



# YOUTH MENTORING:

By **Bwana Clements**  
(Indianapolis 2013)

## Moving from Transactional to Transformational

The discussion around youth mentoring is at an all-time high. Whether it's federal interest from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in Washington providing a new evidence-based strategy or a local church searching for an easy-to-implement, funder-approved strategy, mentoring services are all the rage.

**S**chools, churches, community centers, athletic clubs, professional groups, retired teachers, law enforcement, business owners, and neighborhood "OGs" (Original Gangsters) have all thrown their hats in the proverbial mentoring ring. Some are character-based; some are athletic-based. Some focus on violence prevention and some focus on

academics. Some have well-funded facilities from which to operate, while others use a pick-up and drop-off model. Some use curriculum, while some just speak from the heart. Mentoring services come in all shapes and sizes. My goal is to highlight a few mentoring strategies that I have found to be relevant, culturally appropriate, and highly effective throughout my career working with urban youth in the city of Indianapolis.

Here's what we know. Mentoring is a mutually agreed upon, person-to-person interaction for the expressed intent of passing skill, insight, and knowledge from one person (mentor) to the other (mentee). The Scriptures record Moses mentoring Joshua, Eli mentoring Samuel, and of course, our Lord Jesus mentoring the Twelve. Michael Jordan mentored Scottie Pippin, and Maya Angelou mentored Oprah. Without taking a deep dive into each of these examples, allow me to point out the one thing these mentoring pairs share—relationships. While these references have their own unique qualities and situations, they endured challenges, overcame obstacles, and leveraged the power of relationship to succeed and ultimately produced success.

Effective mentoring must be based on a genuine, enduring, and transparent mentee-focused relationship for accomplishing a goal. The order of this process is important. Notice how "mentee-focused relationship" precedes "accomplishing a goal." In other words, connection before correction. As a professional consultant in educational spaces and as an adjunct professor



**Bawana Clements**

in the education department of a local university, I've had the privilege of learning about the Positive School Discipline Model. In the article, "Connection Before Correction," Dr. Jane Nelsen writes, "Extensive research shows that we cannot influence children in a positive way until we create a connection with them. It is a brain (and heart) thing. Sometimes we have to stop dealing with the misbehavior and first heal the relationship."

Naturally, a follow-up question might be, "How do I connect with a mentee who has bad behavior?" Wink, wink, this is my specialty. We connect by being human, remembering the qualities of our favorite teacher, and seeing behaviors as symptoms of deeper issues and not the essence of the child. We connect by asking what happened to him instead of what's wrong with him. Connecting is about our approach to the mentoring relationship, not simply the outcomes of the relationship. Connecting is about moving from transactional to transformational. Here are a few simple ways to make a connection with your mentee:

1. Be reliable. In other words, be trustworthy. In my home, we say that trust is built by doing what you say, when you say, how you say. I'm

not sure we can be clearer than that. Children need to trust and be confident that you will not be just another adult to disappoint them. Be on time, communicate the reason why a planned event can't happen, and try your best not to underachieve. If you say something, your mentee should be able to believe that it is going to happen.

2. Notice them and be present. As soon as you see your mentee, words should start to flow from your mouth. "There's my guy. Give me some love, man. You're looking great today, Kobe!" Or "There's my guy. Give me some love, brother. Awe, man, that wasn't the Kobe love I'm used to. Something's up." Mentors have to be dialed in. Notice everything like eye contact, hygiene, mood, body language, or whether the mentee is wearing the same clothes he or she had on two days ago. When you see it, call it out. This sends the message to the mentee that you notice him or her.

3. Address concerns. Mentoring provides extremely close access to the most private and intimate areas of a child's life. Often, mentors will be told information before the child has told a parent. Therefore, mentors have the responsibility to advocate for their mentee's well-being in every possible way. Mentors must address the concerns of their mentees or refer them to someone who can.

One of the most important exercises I've completed as a professional was developing my own personal mission statement for the work I do. It reads: "To encourage, educate, and empower the youth, families, and communities I serve through the power of relationships, leaving them more capable than they were before." This guides my interactions with the youth I am blessed to serve. It guides my approach. Notice the statement said nothing of saving, fixing, or changing them. My posture, the one I've chosen, is that I will meet my mentees exactly where they are and encourage, educate, and empower them to the best version of themselves. Sometimes, because of the relationships I create and the posture I assume, mentees exceed their own expectations in the process. This is what it means to move from transactional to transformational.

*Bwana Clements (Indianapolis 2013) is a social worker, professional consultant, program developer, keynote speaker, and author. He earned a BS at Ball State University and an MSW at Indiana University. [bwanaleads@gmail.com](mailto:bwanaleads@gmail.com)*

**"Effective mentoring must be based on a genuine, enduring, and transparent mentee-focused relationship for accomplishing a goal."**



## NC1 2021 Reconvenes Participants with Caution

By Kimberlee Mitchell, Staff

Putting the DVULI training on hold in 2020 was utterly heartbreaking. We lost a few participants because the new 2021 schedule posed some conflicts, but we added some too. The class of 2020 pivoted and became **the resilient DVULI class of 2021!**

Although the pandemic interrupted our 23-year streak, the five cohorts (Chicago, Cincinnati, Denver, Newark, and Oakland) stayed in touch by checking in, praying, and supporting one another—via GroupMe and Zoom—during the 12-month wait. Hence, the “pandemic pause” provided a bonus year of bonding before heading to Orlando for the First National Conference (NC1).

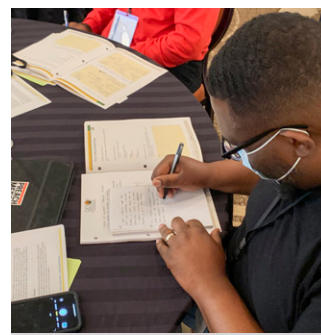
The eager participants were hungry for in-person fellowship and worship. With safety measures closely followed, on-site daily screening ensured the ballroom was COVID-free, adding a feeling of security for all.

We learned that the safety protocol of limiting two people per table made for a more intimate, fruitful discussion and peer learning. Masking up forced participants to look deeper into each other’s eyes.

In the absence of hugs, we found the right words to express emotions, and it proved cathartic. By mid-week, even the quiet participants were opening up and sharing. NC1 was a sacred space where truth was revealed. Tears flowed. Hearts were moved, and nuggets were gleaned. During free time, joyful squeals and laughter echoed through the lobby atrium as the cohorts (and staff) enjoyed family-style game nights.

Worship, devotions, and the core values presentations brought down the house. There were several standing ovations but perhaps the most memorable was the one for Gordon MacDonald. The 82-year-old leadership legend commanded an impressive presence and imparted proverbial gems. The room hushed so his gentle and soft-spoken voice could be heard. One participant shared, “I felt like I was listening to my father!”

All would agree that NC1 2021, held in person, was life-giving. Despite the safety measures, in some respects, the experience was elevated due to them! There was not one positive case all week among conference participants and staff. Shout out to the few participants who hung back but were given a private virtual session later in the month.





# Breakthrough

## Korey “XROSS” Dean (Twin Cities 2018)

By Kimberlee Mitchell, Staff

**Korey Dean (Twin Cities 2018) has the gift of helping young men of color recognize their talents and life purpose by drawing from his own successes and failures.**

**A**rising young sports star and ranked as one of the top 50 blue-chip players in Missouri, Korey dreamed of playing D1 football on TV. One night, after a high school football game, a stranger approached Korey. The man, named Mr. Kalich, complimented his skill on the field but then asked Korey about his grades. Humbly, Korey fessed up to making Cs and Ds.

A leader in the local community, Mr. Kalich promised Korey he would get him a college scholarship if he followed his plan for success. Korey agreed to meet every day after practice at Kalich’s house to complete his homework and receive tutoring in algebra by Kalich’s sixth-grade son. This process, coupled with being mentored by Kalich, made it clear to Korey that something was missing from his personal development.

In a video interview titled *Mentoring Kings*, Korey continues his story and talks about how he got the football scholarship to play at St. John’s University, where he broke sports records and made the Dean’s List. His dreams were further realized when he was recruited to play at the University of Kentucky. There he met his second mentor, Frank McKinney, the Dean of Students at the University of Louisville (U of L).

“He taught me a lot,” beams Korey. “Took me under his wing and gave me my first coaching opportunity.” Korey went on to coach both high school football and basketball while at U of L.



Korey “XROSS” Dean

Tragedy would strike when Korey’s infant son and the baby’s mother were involved in a severe car accident. The baby survived, but the mother of Korey’s son was permanently incapacitated as a result. This forced Korey to become a single dad at age 19.

These and other experiences became the engine behind Korey’s vision for the Man Up Club, a youth leadership program for middle and high school African American male youth. The vision came from deep down in Korey’s soul and was launched in 2015. While bits and pieces were clear to him, he needed to hammer out the entire plan so he could communicate it to others.

“Habakkuk 2:2 tells us not only to write the vision but to make it plain,” he paraphrases. “It was not until I attended DVULI that I was pushed to make the vision plain, clear, and concise.”

“I perceived my ministry as a hobby to do good deeds,” he reasons. “I knew I had a vision from God to develop an urban ministry enterprise that consisted of a mentor leadership organization, a Christian hip-hop record label, and a festival to reach unchurched urban youth.”

DVULI’s personal and ministry assessment workshop teachings helped him “drill down on the value of mentorship,” which is the core component of his organization. The ministry assessment model offered in the workshop

balance the business of ministry with my personal values, such as family, was great teaching of wisdom.”

Korey also found significance in the core value of interdependence that is taught at the same conference. “I would often try to wear too many hats and have a do-it-yourself mentality and working style,” he admits. “This was my security that things would be done right, on time, and with excellence.” Korey continues, “It ultimately became a weakness because, while I could ensure some of my values were met, the adverse action was that it was wearing me thin and limiting my productivity. I had to learn to let go and delegate responsibility to others, to train and trust them to perform. This was difficult for me to do, but it was the most liberating thing I did for myself and the organization. Learning the core value of interdependence



**“It was not until I attended DVULI that I was pushed to make the vision plain, clear, and concise.”**

allowed him to identify and understand his strengths and weaknesses. He learned how they function independently but are also interrelated.

“The Man Up Club operates with a large number of volunteers and ministry partners,” Korey describes. “We combine business owners, youth workers, athletes, clergy, and residents in the community to serve as mentors to our young men.”

Korey said that approximately 75 percent of his programming is through an interrelated approach to problem-solving, social impact, and youth development. Annually, they produce a national Christian hip-hop outreach festival that brings together 25 urban and suburban churches to work together in the inner city.

“The core values and healthy change were presented to me at a very critical time in my life when I needed it the most,” explained Korey, who attended the first national conference in Orlando in 2018. “Permitting people to hold me accountable was pivotal. Learning how to

gave me the confidence and the ability to work from a teamwork perspective and delegate responsibility, which allowed for growth and expanded ministry.”

After completing DVULI, Korey developed a higher level of discipline that helped create the kind of balance he needed in his personal life. “I understand the value of balance and how the lack of it can have a profound and negative impact on the things that I value the most,” he said. “I recognize if I am not taking care of myself, it negatively impacts my ability to be effective in ministry, and if I am overly focused on ministry, it becomes counterproductive.”

This is a new season for Korey, who is realizing breakthroughs in a manner that he could not foresee when considering whether or not to embark upon the DVULI learning journey. With an expanded support system of fellow alumni, Korey is grateful for trusting the process and what it has afforded him.

“Often in life, we accept assignments and opportunities because we simply want to give ourselves the best chance of success without full confidence in the steps we are taking,” he reflects. “DVULI has been an endless resource for personal and professional development, a well of urban knowledge and wisdom that never runs dry. There were so many golden nuggets given to me on my first day of orientation, throughout the entire course, immediately upon graduating, and many years after graduating to develop my ministry.

“DVULI does a spectacular job of authentically mapping out the personal and professional growth needed for people who have talent and who are called to serve the kingdom of God in significant ways,” notes Korey.



# Mending the Fatherless Fracture by Mentorship

Opinion by **Jon Coker** (San Antonio 2017)



Jon Coker

**While another generation suffers through an epidemic of fatherlessness, many youth leaders are forsaking their posts as mentors in pursuit of social media influence.**

There are a few species of chameleons that have live births instead of laying eggs. The mothers climb into the trees and leave their babies to fend for themselves. Within seconds, the newborns conjure up the strength to hobble to safety fully aware of the predators that lurk nearby. The more culture influences the church, the more youth discipleship is reduced to “Chameleon Christianity.” The introduction into the faith is often focused on the highs of our youth events from which we’re birthing young people into the kingdom with little to no follow-up guidance and mentorship. As a result of navigating the challenges and questions of this new life alone, our youth are camouflaging to the culture and filling in the blanks with substances, sex, and other risky behaviors, leaving God out of their survival plan more and more.

For many emerging leaders called to this generation, following Jesus is just as casual as following a celebrity on social media. We subscribe to His teachings as an optional standard for morality but scroll past His Lordship.

Presenting a non-confrontational gospel fixed on self-help, satisfaction, and staying #OnMyGrind, becomes a sure way to rally followers on most platforms. Social influencers are today what rappers were to urban communities in the 1990s. Their credibility is so weighty that Fortune 500 companies are willing to pay them to market directly to their following. Subscribers have become a symbol of status and a stamp of authority, which is why creating leadership content is far more advantageous than actually leading people.

I’m not throwing shade at social influencers. I have great respect for the profession and anyone who can successfully get their message above the noise of the net. But when we take the influencer mindset into our mentoring relationships, we lose influence. A suicidal teenager cannot wait in your DMs (direct messages) for an answer. They need access to our lives.

One in three young people is growing up without a father in their household. That fracture follows them for the rest of their lives if no one steps in to bridge that gap.

It’s almost surreal to say it, but there is a new generation of fathers who are millennials. This generation disrupted every industry, invented selfies, and taught the world that coffee shops make better workspaces than cubicles. What happens if the innovation generation finds a new way to do everything, including passing the mantle? If our pursuit is all about “doing me” and climbing up the tree, then our youth will never be more to us than numbers on the scoreboards of our programs.

The kids in our communities become the currency of our social engagement to prove that we are “killing the game.” Mentorship does not work in selfie mode. We have to flip our focus from a programming paradigm to a relational experience.

Before the pandemic, young people ages 12–18 spent up to nine hours a day on screens. That number increased during the lockdowns. With all the influences they are exposed to online, none of them make up for the voice of one consistent role model. Someone summed up the impact of the fatherlessness epidemic by saying, “Every child has a hole in their soul in the shape of their father if their father is missing.” Absent fathers create gaps in the lives of nearly 24 million young people in the US, and those gaps are often filled with vices that put our youth at risk. One hour a month can change a child’s life trajectory from drug addiction, incarceration, teen pregnancy, and suicide to an ever-increasing track of achievement and fulfillment.

The Search Institute has surveyed more than six million young people since 1990 in their research of the 40 Developmental Assets. The trend has consistently revealed that the more external assets (relationships, supports, and opportunities) and internal assets (skills, commitments, and personal values) children have in their lives, the more likely they are to thrive and avoid risky behaviors. In other words, it takes a village to raise a child, but it only takes one child to transform a village.

Mentors must live their lives within imitation distance of those they lead. The Bible details the best examples of strong mentorship through the lives of people like Elijah or Moses. Even Jesus, who, in three years, launched a mentorship movement that continues to increase to this day. Elijah demonstrated faith in the power of God within imitation distance of his spiritual son, Elisha. As a result, Elisha’s first miracle

was identical to his mentor’s last miracle. He raised the mantle, called on “the LORD, the God of Elijah,” struck the waters of the Jordan River, and parted them in two (2 Kings 2:14). Elisha had a natural father but gleaned invaluable wisdom and strength from his spiritual father and mentor, Elijah.

We tend to feel disadvantaged by what we lack, especially when our fathers are not there for us. Our heavenly Father is such a great provider that He ensures we will always have what we need even if it does not come from the place we prefer. On the flip side, God has equipped each one of us to be a guide and a gap-filler for someone else. We are qualified for mentorship by the things that make us feel most unqualified. The apostle Paul says it best in 2 Corinthians 1:3–5 (ESV):

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

**“Mentorship does not work in selfie mode. We have to flip our focus from a programming paradigm to a relational experience.”**

It is no secret that hurt people hurt people, but according to the truth in this scripture, if we trust God with our brokenness, He not only comforts us but also equips us to be comforters to others who need the same comfort we once received. That’s a lot of comfort!

Suffering without surrender creates selfishness. If we never avail ourselves to receive the comfort of God, we never discover the purpose for our pain and inadvertently deprive others of life-giving hope. We become the chameleon who focuses on climbing higher and higher up the tree while dropping generations in the dirt to start the cycle over.

Today, embrace the challenge of being a voice of affirmation, an example of integrity, and a point of contact for comfort even if you never had it. This is our time to shift our focus and stand in the gap for those fractured by their fathers.

*Jon Coker (San Antonio 2017) is the Student Ministries Director at Christian World Worship Center in San Antonio, Texas. He is also a multimedia journalist and digital reporter for KENS-5, a public speaker, and a contributing writer. [jcoker34@gmail.com](mailto:jcoker34@gmail.com)*



# Myron Bernard (Seattle Tacoma 2011)

ORGANIZATION: **Youth for Christ USA**

CURRENT POSITION: **Leader Formation Specialist**



Myron Bernard

**“The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”**

~Frederick Buechner

willing but unsure how. Ultimately, building a movement that empowers others requires a significant cultural shift for our organization, and culture shifts are hard to bring about.

## What collaborative opportunities are benefiting this work?

The local church is a major partner of the work that I do at YFC. We endeavor for local church leaders to engage with youth in meaningful ways that build faith and character while developing an understanding of their unique necessity in the body of Christ. Beyond the local church, we also partner with national organizations like Young Life, Cru, Navigators, and Urban Youth Workers Institute. Through our partnerships

## How has serving with Youth for Christ helped you fulfill your mission in life?

This is my tenth year on staff with Youth for Christ (YFC). During the pandemic season, God shifted me into a new position that perfectly fit the gifts He gave me. At our corporate office, I serve in a role focused on leader formation for the 140 YFC chapters across the United States. I have a passion for developing leaders. In this role, I get to plan conferences, lead virtual trainings, and facilitate monthly leader formation calls with new staff and executive leaders. Each event, meeting, or call is a chance to draw out the inner giftings of our staff and executive leaders.

## Was there a specific moment that made you want to do ministry for the rest of your life?

I met Jesus in second grade while sitting in a church service at Kingsland Baptist Church in Katy, Texas. Not long after I got saved, my family relocated, and my faith was tested. I experienced brokenness as my family fell apart. In college, I discovered a church that transformed my thinking. The church taught me that God is always doing something now for the next generation. Joel 2:28 says, “Your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions” (NIV). This generation has to reach back to the next generation so we can all move forward. Leadership is generational and has to be shared. If this next generation is to know and love Jesus, we must approach ministry with a different mindset that takes full advantage of the lessons we’ve learned about capacity and leverage. I have seen the visions, and now I share my dreams for future generations.

## What do you hope to accomplish while serving at Youth for Christ?

As an 80-year-old organization, YFC has developed a pattern for leadership and appearance. Recently, we have seen outstanding organizational changes that will create a beneficial impact across our various YFC chapters. We are challenging our leaders to adopt a new mindset and ministry habits of empowerment. This is not a quick turn, but it is necessary. I would love to see every chapter functioning in a new paradigm of leader empowerment. Instead of focusing our efforts on staff doing direct ministry, we can shift to building up and empowering leaders among youth and adult volunteers. This year, YFC USA named Jessica Taylor (a DVULI alumna from Portland) Chief of Staff. Her position says something significant about YFC’s commitment to diversity and its effort to doing things differently. I know Jessica will help YFC become more diverse not only in how we look as a staff but also in how we think and who we serve. God has done a lot historically through YFC and is going to continue to do great things. I plan to help build a diverse and creative YFC organization as we follow God’s mission.

## What challenges have you or the organization had to overcome?

New paradigms are difficult to implement. Whether because of bad habits, risk aversion, or just plain complacency, getting others to be open to change can be hard work. We’re trying to encourage ministry leaders to adopt a new mindset and ministry habits of empowerment, but sometimes leaders are unsure about making that commitment. Other times they’re

By **Will Cumby** (Houston 2010)

and leader formation meetings, we learn from each other, but our focus on youth evangelism remains paramount. The partnerships help challenge our programming and push us to creatively address our strategic plans.

## What learning principle from your DVULI training experience are you applying in this role?

Empowerment. Empowerment helps ministries become more fruitful and builds the body of Christ at large. I had an opportunity to supervise and mentor a particular leader. Rachael is a former staff member, and I am beyond grateful to witness her growth. Through our development meetings, I helped Rachael articulate her passions and then promoted her to a position where she could maximize her leadership development skills. Now, she runs her own consulting company that addresses equity and diversity in school districts and corporate businesses. During a DVULI core value session in Orlando, Florida, I heard this unforgettable quote by Frederick Buechner, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” I embrace this as my life goal and my aspiration for how I empower leaders.

## How can your DVULI family pray for you as you move forward?

I would love and appreciate prayers for young leaders. We need a generation of young leaders who will build and lead the body of Christ. We need this in YFC, but the kingdom of God needs this as a whole—a generation that pursues Jesus.



# ALUMNI UPDATES



**Bernard Emerson**  
(Oakland SF Bay 2017) recently accepted the position of Executive Minister of Converge PacWest.



**Brad Isaak**  
(Fresno 2016) became a father for the second time on March 13, 2021 to baby Mathias.

**Jessica Taylor**

(Portland 2013) accepted a new role as Chief of Staff for Youth for Christ USA.



**J Martinez**

(Miami 2018) is the new Vice President/Chief Operating Officer of Hope for Miami in Florida.



**Tamir Reyes**

(Newark 2014) is now Clinical Director at Savia Community Counseling in New Jersey.



**Mark Timmons**

(Orlando 2016) and his wife, Tiauna, welcomed their second child, Aala Riley, into the world on March 19, 2021.

**Angela Cross**

(Seattle Tacoma 2011) has launched a new blog called *4TheSelf: All Things Self-Development* with Anji Cross.



**Mona Thompson**

(Boston 1998) made local news on ABC affiliate WCVB-5 for her ministry to young women via RISE (Reaching Into Self-Esteem).



**Jordan Francis**

(Phoenix 2016) and his wife, Katie, welcomed their third child, JJ, into the world on February 28, 2021.



**Sean Goode**

(Seattle 2012) now leads a webinar with the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* on winning grants for advancing racial equity.

**FOR MORE, VISIT**



[facebook.com/dvuli](https://facebook.com/dvuli)



[instagram.com/dvuli](https://instagram.com/dvuli)



[linkedin.com/company/dvuli](https://linkedin.com/company/dvuli)



[twitter.com/DVULI](https://twitter.com/DVULI)

## What's your new status?

DVULI loves to share what's going on in the lives and ministries of our alumni family. Tell us your update at:

[www.dvuli.org/alumni-resources](https://www.dvuli.org/alumni-resources)