2026 DIOCESE OF ATLANTA YOUTH MINISTRIES REPORT

We exist to form disciples by sharing the inclusive and unconditional love of Jesus Christ in worship, servant leadership, and spiritual formation.

YOUTH MINISTRIES

The Office of Diocesan Youth Ministries serves both the young people of our diocese and the adults who accompany them. We equip youth ministers and parish leaders with resources, support, and a strong network of colleagues. Together, we all work to create opportunities for middle and high school students to encounter God, build community, and grow as leaders.

Our diocesan programs complement parish youth ministry by connecting young people to the wider Church and giving them opportunities to deepen and practice their faith. In 2027, we will continue expanding our regional presence with a new gathering in the Chattahoochee Valley Convocation, helping ensure that diocesan youth ministries serve communities throughout Middle and North Georgia, not just Atlanta and its suburbs.

We are also making a deeper investment in the people who make these ministries possible. EYCDIOATL now benefits from a robust team of adult lay and clergy leaders who give significant time, expertise, and care to our programs. This budget includes stipends for key adult leaders as a tangible acknowledgment of the value of their work. We have also added a Leadership Training Retreat that will bring together leaders of all ages from Youth Commission, Happening, and New Beginnings for shared formation and community-building. By investing in these leaders, we strengthen our ministries.

In 2027, we will also relaunch **Steps2Lead**, a selective leadership cohort in which high school students explore the leadership of Jesus through the lens of adaptive leadership with Bishop Wright. We will continue providing formation and ministry resources for youth and people of all ages through **Keep Watch**, our diocesan suicide prevention ministry, and anticipate launching the second edition of *Keep Watch: Suicide, Christ + Community* in 2027.

Together, these investments reflect our commitment to forming young people while also strengthening the adults, leaders, and communities who accompany them. Our goal is for young people to see that their voices matter, their leadership is needed, their faith has depth, and that they belong to a Church much larger than any one congregation.

THE KEEP WATCH PROJECT

In 2026, Keep Watch continued to grow as a ministry of suicide prevention, equipping communities across The Episcopal Church to respond to suicide with compassion, confidence, and care. Rooted in the conviction that suicide prevention is a shared responsibility of Christian community, Keep Watch helps congregations and ministry leaders recognize warning signs, respond to people in crisis, and cultivate communities of connection and belonging.

Throughout 2026, Keep Watch provided suicide prevention education to parishes, dioceses, and ministry leaders across The Episcopal Church. This included work with the Dioceses of Louisiana, Olympia, and Oklahoma, as well as Province IV youth ministry leaders. These opportunities reflect a growing recognition of the Church's role in suicide prevention and the need for practical, theologically grounded resources that help communities take meaningful action. We have also been developing new

partnerships, including with Episcopal Service Corps, to expand access to suicide prevention formation and support for young adults and those who accompany them.

A significant priority in 2026 has been assembling a new Keep Watch oversight board, bringing together mental health clinicians, suicide prevention experts, and ministry leaders. This team will provide guidance, accountability, and expertise as Keep Watch continues to grow, helping ensure that our resources and training reflect current best practices while remaining grounded in the pastoral and theological life of the Church.

Work is also underway on a second edition of *Keep Watch: Suicide, Christ + Community*, anticipated for publication in late 2027/early 2028. The revised edition will build on the original resource, incorporating insights from our ongoing training, ministry partnerships, and developments in suicide prevention practice.

As Keep Watch grows, our focus remains on building the capacity of local communities to care for one another. We envision a Church in which clergy and lay leaders are equipped to recognize and respond to suicide risk, where conversations about mental health are met with compassion rather than stigma, and where those affected by suicide find meaningful support and belonging.

Suicide prevention training helps the Church pay attention, make room for suffering, and accompany people who are struggling. Our work continues!

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