

# HIGH POINT

Helping Churches, Disciples and Leaders

*Flourish*



*"...He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."*

(Philippians 1:6)

## I Don't Think You're Alone, Rachel

An interview with Rachel Young, Associate Pastor of Spiritual Formation, Clear Lake Presbyterian Church in Houston, TX.



Rachel Young

Seven years ago, Rachel and Josh Young received a phone call during their honeymoon that would lead them from Hollywood to Houston. As newlyweds and recent graduates of Fuller Seminary, they had been praying for an opportunity to minister in the same church. So when the call turned out to be a job offer for Josh from Clear Lake Presbyterian in Houston,

and there was a position open for Rachel as well, it felt like a blessing from God. They both still serve at Clear Lake, though their roles have changed over the years and Rachel has shifted to a part-time position with a focus on adult discipleship in order to spend time with their just-turned-one son, Ezekiel.

Rachel first crossed paths with Ascending Leaders three years ago, during a time of significant burn-out. At work, she was lost in the middle of a visioning process at church that was getting bigger and bigger, to the point where the process became entirely overwhelming. It seemed like they were maintaining a lot of "stuff," without knowing why. In short, she felt stuck—personally and in leadership. In her case, STUCK meant UNFOCUSED.

That's when she met Mike Johnson at an event for Fuller alumni. She remembered seeing something in

the mail from Ascending Leaders, and opening it because it said something about discipleship. She shared a meal with Mike, intent on picking his brain about discipleship and what he was teaching at Fuller at the time. Shortly after that, she took a medical leave of absence—and that's when Ascending Leaders really became a blessing to her.

During the medical leave, Rachel prompted her small group to do a test run of a study from Ascending Leaders: *Your Pathways*. The Pathways study reminded Rachel of who she was, and she was surprised to discover that she was not, as she expected, a "Contemplative" relational type, but rather an "Ascetic." This discovery gave her the permission she needed to be herself, and equipped her to have compassion on how other people connect to God in different ways. She recognized this as a sign of growing spiritual maturity—the point of which is growing more and more in love with Jesus.

Shortly after Rachel returned to work, another staff member attended *DiscipleForward* and came back with a good report. So when Mike asked Rachel if Clear Lake Presbyterian Church might host a *DiscipleForward* workshop, the answer came easily.

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At the end of the workshop, Rachel was excited and energized by the process of redefining what discipleship is, and the framework of aligning church activities and programs to a clear disciple path as “boulders, rocks, or pebbles”. She was still at a loss on how to carry this new focus forward into action—but she knew she was onto something that was worth pursuing.

Her newly-formed discipleship team participated in *DiscipleForward2: GoingDeeper* and then *DiscipleForward3: HereToThere*, and Rachel eagerly joined the test group for the DiscipleOn online learning community. At a retreat this past summer, her team drew out a pathway with rocks and boulders, and the focus this brought to their vision for discipleship generated tangible momentum. Having her team on the same page, their thinking on discipleship shaped by the same influences, keeps them focused.

When asked why she keeps coming back to Ascending Leaders, Rachel recalls a moment in a workshop when she expressed great frustration over a challenge she was facing in her leadership—and someone piped up to say, with genuine empathy, “I don’t think you’re

**What gives you hope for discipleship in the church today?**

*Rachel: “God has been shaping Jesus followers for two-thousand years. He does the transformation work. It’s not about me or up to me. My question, my work, is how do we encourage people to engage in spiritual friendship? How do we prepare the soil for deep relationships?”*

alone, Rachel.” Isn’t that what we all long to hear in our difficult moments? It’s hard, and I know this because you are not alone in facing it. Discipleship at the congregation level is unwieldy; being part of a community of people trying to do similar things at their churches helps, and it’s been just what Rachel and her discipleship team needs.

*If you’d like to know more about Rachel’s story, including what she believes is the biggest challenge faced by the church today and what she’s reading right now, check our blog for bonus content. You can also connect with Rachel at <http://reverendrachel.wordpress.com/>.*

*And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.” Hebrews 10:24*

The next 6-month session of *DiscipleOn* begins February 2017. Learn more at [www.ascendingleaders.org/discipleon](http://www.ascendingleaders.org/discipleon)



## A Framework for Focus: The Key to Getting *Unstuck*

By Megan LaFollett

One of the most important parts of my role as Communications Lead for Ascending Leaders is understanding not only what it is, exactly, that we do as an organization, but also *why* it’s needed. If I don’t understand the difference we make, then any communication of what we do or how we do it would be an empty vessel, words without meaning. I was drawn to Ascending Leaders because of my own passion for seeing people grow in Christ. In my ongoing quest to assimilate over a decade of work helping

churches get more effective at doing just that, I’ve spent the past month researching our relationship with a few specific churches, each chosen to provide an example of churches at different—dare I say—*stages* of coaching. Here I’ll share the information I found most illuminating, before stating my personal understanding of the “why”.



*“The culture of Prairie City CRC has shown a shift toward discipleship as spontaneous discussions about growing closer to God have begun to erupt during fellowship time after the morning service. God brought us to this place by using Dr. Mike Johnson and Ascending Leaders, over three years, to lay the foundation for movement toward defining life and church through God’s Word and his call to be disciples who make disciples.”*  
Rev. Matt McClure, Senior Pastor of Prairie City CRC

Madison Church is crafting testimonies around the stages of faith to help people articulate their faith and understand the stages. Would you like to try your hand at it, and see what you might discover about yourself? Visit our blog for a guide on how to do just that.

### ONLINE CONTENT ALERT:

A video of Mike Johnson’s “Stages of Faith” Testimony is available to watch on our website or Facebook page. Keep an eye out for more testimony videos from Ascending Leaders staff, as we continue to practice what we preach!

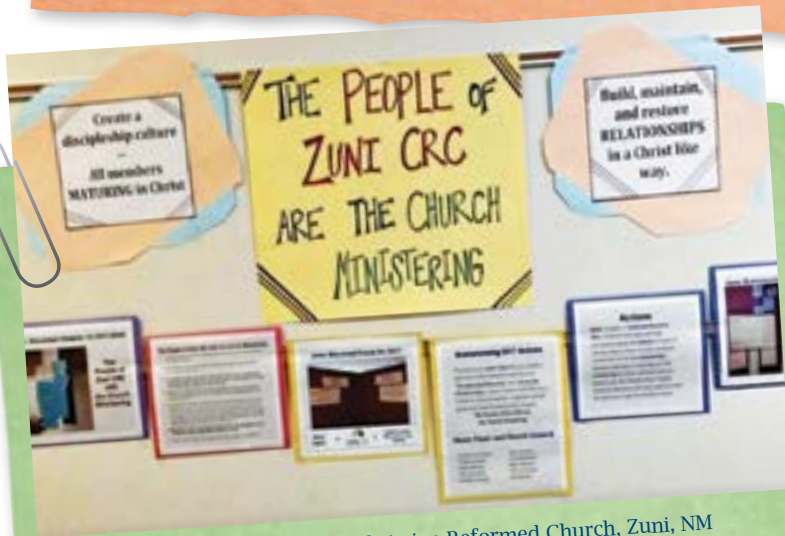
**Darrell Delaney**

To: Megan LaFollett <megan@ascendingleaders.org>

I believe the most frustrating thing about our discipleship pathway before, is the fact that there didn't seem to have a clear delineation of how to get on the path, and what markers were there to move a person forward on the pathway. In other words, how can one know WHERE you are, and HOW to grow? These are the most important things that Ascending Leaders helped us to clearly define in our work together. Now we have a clearer sense of how to assess where people are and how people can grow in their discipleship. We are most grateful for this process. Does that help?

In Christ,  
Rev. Darrell L. Delaney  
Madison Church, Square Campus Pastor  
Following Christ together as a Diverse Community

Yes! 😊



Completed Vision Wall for Zuni Christian Reformed Church, Zuni, NM

## Zuni and Tacoma CRC Momentum

Several key words and phrases came up repeatedly during the research process: alignment, defining, assessment, measurable, outcomes, focus, perspective. **The consistent theme I found was that the framework Ascending Leaders uses to help churches clarify their discipleship process takes “stuff” (and usually good but confusing stuff) and turns it into a well-defined pathway.** Vital to this transformation is an outside perspective from a coach with an adaptive spirit, a common vocabulary among leadership, perseverance, a sensitivity to what God is already doing in the church, and a clearly defined and measurable desired outcome. The “why” a church might call us in to help turns out to be surprisingly simple: Do their people know where to grow? If they don't, then they are STUCK. Coaching for clarity leads to momentum—and that means movement, or becoming unstuck.

Madison Church, Grand Rapids, MI  
– Report on cross-section of newcomers showed strong sense of identity around church affiliation, not around Jesus Christ.

Unveiled need to:

- Review existing processes for helping move people toward maturity
- Establish a more clear and articulated discipleship process with clear outcomes
- Form a task force to go deeper into improving pathway, investigate hiring a consultant

2014 – Talked to Mike, researched Ascending Leaders, coffee meeting led to coaching

Eureka at retreat: “So we went through a whole morning of discovering that we didn't have a pathway at all. We had lots of ‘stuff’ but it wasn't very clear. That was a defining moment for us.”

Not a sprint, not even a marathon...  
an Iron Man event.

“Go Slow to Go Long”

Executive Director Mike Johnson





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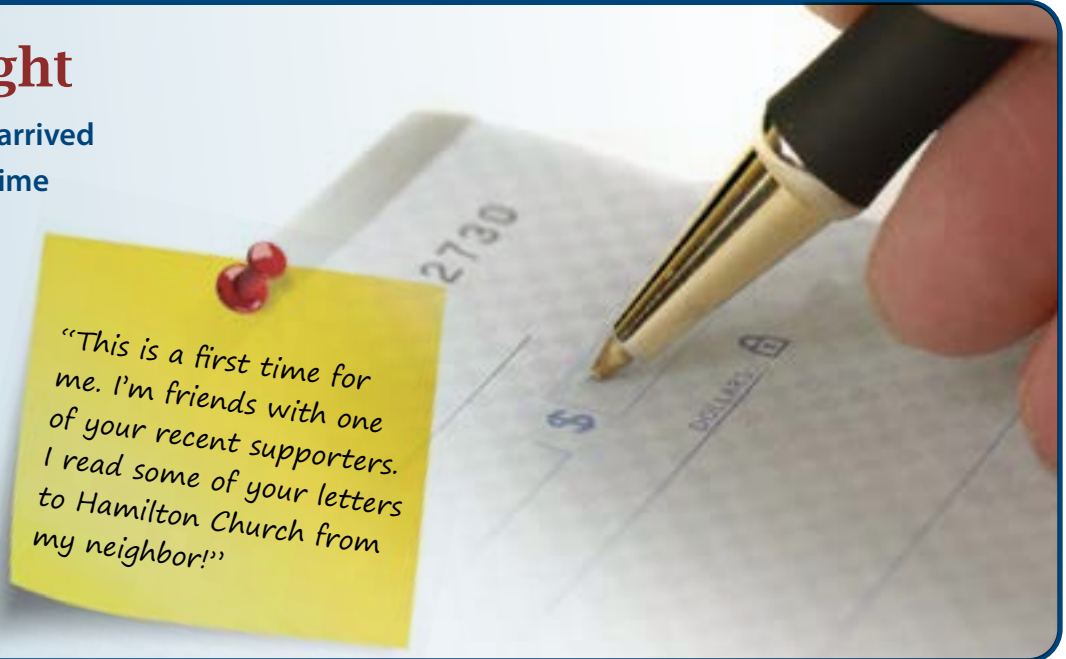
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## Donor Spotlight

Recently, this sweet note arrived with a check from a first-time donor. We love hearing from our supporters! And knowing that our community is sharing Ascending Leaders news with their neighbors brings a warm smile to all of us here in the Sugar Land office.



*"This is a first time for me. I'm friends with one of your recent supporters. I read some of your letters to Hamilton Church from my neighbor!"*

## You're THE KEY to unlocking treasure for the kingdom!

Your donation on National Giving Day will be **QUADRUPLED** by our **Matching <sup>2</sup> Multiply** crew.

2016

All other year-end gifts will be **DOUBLED!**

*Flourish* through

Trusted to help Churches, Disciples and Leaders



\*Donate online at [www.ascendingleaders.org](http://www.ascendingleaders.org) or mail to 3947 Field Crossing Sugar Land, TX 77498 on Nov. 29. Since Ascending Leaders is recognized as a 501 (c) 3 by the U.S. IRS all donations are tax deductible.