



What is Orange Conference?

Orange Conference is an event hosted yearly in Atlanta, Georgia “for leaders in ministry all over the world—kids ministry, preschool ministry, middle school ministry, high school ministry, and family or next gen ministry. It’s for volunteers, staff, and volunteer-staff at churches who care about the faith and future of the next generation” ([Orange Conference FAQ](#)). At #OC22, there were over 6,000 participants who represented all 50 states and at least 15 different countries.

While [Orange](#) (an entity of the [reThink Group](#)) provides religious education curriculum for churches, they do *so much more*. The “Orange Philosophy”—as explained in *Family Ministry Essentials: An Orange Strategy Guide*—centers around the notion that: “Two combined influences can make a greater impact than just two influences.” The combination of “the light of the church” (yellow) and “the heart of the home” (red) create a force to be reckoned with when it comes to kid, youth, and families ministries (thus, ORANGE). You don’t need to use their curriculum to apply the “Orange Philosophy!” I was very inspired by this model and am eager to find ways to apply this idea to the ministries here at First Congregational UCC.

I went into the conference having *zero* idea of what to expect, and was blown away by the networking events, sessions, breakout experiences, and various exhibitors. I’m sure glad

that I saved room in my suitcase for all of the information packets and books that I brought back with me!

What made my attendance worth it?

Three main elements that made this conference well worth my time:

1. THE SPEAKERS

- Orange Conference pulled in a number of well-versed and well-known speakers both within and outside of ministry to spread their wisdom and inspire us. Many of the words the individual speakers said helped me to “fill in some cracks” in terms of how we do youth programming and how we think about ministry in the 21st century. I was *seriously* blown away by their wisdom and words!

2. THE RESOURCES

- As for physical resources, other than my speaker notes, I brought back four books:
 - [*Family Ministry Essentials: An Orange Strategy Guide*](#)
 - [*Seen: Healing Despair and Anxiety in Kids and Teens Through the Power of Connection*](#) by [Will Hutcherson](#) (Founder of Curate Hope, and a Next Gen/Youth Pastor) and [Chinwé Williams, Ph.D.](#) (Licensed and Board-Certified Therapist)
 - [*The Art of Group Talk: How to Lead Better Conversations with Kids and Preschoolers*](#) by Afton Phillips (Lead Small Director at Orange) and [Adam Duckworth](#) (Volunteer Coordinator - Downtown Harbor Church)
 - [*Communicating to Middle Schoolers: A Guide to Developing and Delivering Messages that Stick*](#) by [Ashley Bohinc](#) (Director of Middle School Strategy at Orange)
- Out of the *plethora* of books available, I selected each of these materials based off of the age group that they focused on, their thematic content, interactivity, and their “ease of use” (aka: its set-up being more like a handbook with tools and easily-identified “big ideas” rather than a long-winded novel). While there is a time and place for in-depth novels (and I even purchased a few of those for myself while at the conference!), I felt that for the benefit of myself and future youth directors at First Congregational, it was more feasible that a resource will be utilized if it can be used as a quick reference instead of a longer, sit-down-for-hours read.

3. THE OVERALL COMMITMENT TO LOVING OUR YOUTH AND KIDS

- The whole theme of the conference was to “Be Human.” Our kids, youth, volunteers, parents, guardians, caregivers, church members, strangers, friends, and selves are simply and wonderfully HUMAN. When we return to this

idea, we can wipe away our judgements and assumptions, enabling us to build better relationships with, support, and inspire this younger generation.

Finally, a BONUS ELEMENT that made my attendance worth it... IT WAS FREE! I won the ticket to this experience at the Women in Youth Ministry Conference in March.

Additionally, with the resources of many, my travel expenses were covered IN FULL! I kid you not when I say that the *second* after I won the ticket, a couple of different people approached me and said that they could help get me to the conference, be it plane tickets, lodging, or space in their rental car. The week after I returned from that conference, I followed up with these people and long-story-short, it all incredibly fell into place in a way that made it so that I couldn't NOT go! My gratitude for these individuals is *enormous* and I am *incredibly* thankful to have been blessed by their willingness to serve and support a fellow human!

YOU CAN READ ON BELOW IF YOU WISH TO LEARN A LITTLE MORE ABOUT THE SESSIONS AND SPEAKERS AS WELL AS VIEW SOME "THANK YOU'S"

Hit me with those highlights!

Below, you will find the sessions and breakouts listed with one (or two... some of them were just THAT good!) main point.

This year's theme was "[Be Human](#)." Throughout the conference, the speakers heavily engaged with this theme by starting with the phrase: "TO BE HUMAN MEANS TO..."

...BE FASCINATING

"God's favorite hobby is redemption."

-[Jon Acoff](#) (New York Times bestselling author)

...BE COMPLICATED

"Humans are more than one thing... Foster curiosity and ask: 'What is it like to be you?'"

-[Ryan Leak](#) (Speaker, Author, & Executive Coach)

...SEE OTHERS

"No matter how dark the night, morning is coming."

-[Liz Bohannon](#) (founder of [Sseko Designs](#))

...BE FLAWED

"Our desire for home should shape how we build the church."

-[Kristen Ivy](#) (President at [Orange, Parent Cue](#); Co-founder [The Phase Project](#))

...ASK QUESTIONS

Our youth are asking three big questions that revolve around identity, belonging, and purpose. How we answer the following three questions can make or break relationships and either help or hurt their faith formation:

1. “Who am I?”
2. “Where do I fit?”
3. “What difference can I make?”

- [Kara Powell, PhD](#) (Executive Director of [Fuller Youth Institute](#); Chief of Leadership Formation at [Fuller Seminary](#))

...START SMALL

“Sometimes something small makes a big difference.”

- [Doug Fields](#) (Co-founder & President of [Download Youth Ministry](#))

...BE EXPRESSIVE

“We are created to create by the author who created.”

...OVERTHINK

“Kids and youth are WAY braver than us adults.”

- [Jon Acoff](#) (*New York Times* bestselling author)

...HAVE SCARS

- “When we are vulnerable about our scars, our youth and kids will find it okay to be vulnerable, too.”
- “Absurd times call for absurd amounts of love.”

- [Brad Montague](#) (author and creator of the web series [Kid President](#))

...BE HOPEFUL

“What’s at stake for the next generation if we don’t hand them some hope? Commitment to change-making.”

- [Dani Coke](#) (social justice & faith-based artwork)

...BE FREE

“Sometimes we are planted into a container that is too small, which limits our ability to grow... We’ve got to break the containers of oppression.”

- [Danielle Strickland](#) (spiritual leader, justice advocate, communicator, peacemaker)

...BE SURROUNDED BY TECHNOLOGY

“As technology develops so rapidly, and everything becomes increasingly reduced to an algorithm, it becomes harder and harder to see divinity in the eyes of humanity.”

-[Kristen Ivy](#) (President at [Orange, Parent Cue](#); Co-founder [The Phase Project](#))

...BE A PART OF A FAMILY

“We need to respect other churches even when we disagree, because we really do share common goals.”

...BE A PART OF A COMMUNITY

“One of the best ways we can serve our community is to serve our public schools and to do so without an agenda.”

...LOVE

“The first mile is mandatory, the second is for relationship.”

-[Albert Tate](#) (Author; Founding and lead pastor of [Fellowship Church](#))

...BE HUMBLE

- “People need to be SEEN, HEARD, and LOVED by leaders.”
- “Our brains need negativity to survive, but positivity to thrive.”
- “It’s not about the name above the church door, it’s about the name above all names.”

-[Mark Batterson](#) (Bestselling author; Lead Pastor at [National Community Church](#))

...BE INTENTIONAL

“We must stand with their pains and joys on their own terms.”

-[Chuck Hunt](#) ([Fuller Youth Institute](#) speaker; Family Ministry Pastor at [Lake Ave Church](#))

...BE IN A CONSTANTLY CHANGING WORLD

- “You don’t have to know it all to start leading.”
- “We need to have this phrase at the top of our vocab: ‘I don’t know.’”
- “Get the right people on the bus and a few who aren’t so right... ‘Right’ does not mean ‘same’ and ‘right’ is ALWAYS changing... ‘Wrong’ people can often be helpful in making ‘right decisions.’”

-[Clay Scroggins](#) (Pastor, Speaker, Author, Thinker)

...TALK ABOUT HARD THINGS

- “What is the faith of the next generation worth???”

- “We as leaders much give other leaders grace... lead this example for others, otherwise, they may think that they don’t need to give others grace either.”

...STAY HUMAN

- “We can’t just stand off to the side and watch, we MUST get IN the chariot.” (in reference to the story of Philip and the eunuch in Acts 8)
- “It’s not that God’s not speaking, it’s that the volume of content drones over.”
- [Carlos Whittaker](#) (People’s Choice Award winner; Author; Speaker; Musician; “Hope Dealer”)

Did somebody say ‘breakouts’?

The fun didn’t stop with the sessions! The second day of the conference, participants migrated to different locations around the Atlanta area to do some more learning in their more specific ministry field. I attended the Family and Leadership Ministries area, and attended three different breakouts...

Leading Up: Managing Adaptive Change in Ministry

In this breakout, we discussed the difference between technical and adaptive change... a “microwave” vs. a “slow-cooker,” approach, respectfully.

- [Jake Mulder, MDiv](#) (Senior Director of Strategy at [Fuller Youth Institute](#); Executive Director of Leadership Formation at [Fuller Seminary](#))

What Parents Aren't Telling You, But You Need to Know

This breakout examined data pulled from [Arbor Research Group and Parent Cue’s research](#) on “what parents want,” “how parents feel,” “what parents fear,” and “where parents go for help.” Through examining these four inquiries to both parents and caregivers of Christian faith and of the general population, they found that both groups of caregivers generally see eye-to-eye on all of the aforementioned questions. Another notable statistic is: “65% of all parents across the phases would like more family experiences.” What can we do as a church to provide more programming centered around engaging the *whole* family, not just the youth?

- Mitchell McGhee (Director of Parent Engagement at [Parent Cue](#))

Resilient Leadership

One of my favorite parts of this breakout was the discussion of the concept of Shalom and the wholeness of spirit, soul (mind, will, and emotions), and body. “Not everything is perfect, it’s the way that things connect and interact with each other that is perfect.” (covenant between the people and God, something we discussed heavily in my Hebrew Bible 1 course in seminary this spring).

- [Danielle Strickland](#) (spiritual leader, justice advocate, communicator, peacemaker)

This opportunity would not have been possible without a number of special humans to help me out!

- Orange Conference in general, as they provided the free ticket I won at the Women in Youth Ministry Conference in March.
- Tyler and Charlie of Orange, who worked with me (and worked hard!) to make it possible for me to attend Orange Conference and invited us to a couple networking events while there.
- Bri and Miranda, my travel-mates, who so graciously included me in their hotel and rental car plans and were all-around fun to hang out with during the week.
- My in-laws for letting me crash the night before my departing flight and for picking me up from the airport after the conference (and feeding me!). They also let me borrow their air mattress pump after I had bought one that didn't work.
- Jonny of National Network of Youth Ministries, who invited my travel buddies and I to an additional networking event and for taking time to listen to our experiences in youth ministry.