



St. Simon Parish Youth Center Opening Address by Kalena Moreira, Youth Minister

With our new youth center opening I found myself reflecting on my journey through the world of St Simon Youth Ministry. It all began right here at Saint Simon, where I started as a participant. Those early days forged lasting friendships, many that I still have and continue to warm my heart. From Kindergarten to Eighth grade, I navigated the corridors of learning while undergoing sacramental preparations that left a permanent mark on my soul.

But the true turning point came when I stepped into the role of a volunteer. I eagerly volunteered at every Confirmation retreat, just a few years after my own. There, I encountered remarkable individuals who shared my passion for faith. We formed small groups, sat on leadership teams, and eventually formed our own. The VBS CORE team became a beacon of light in my world of youth ministry. Together, as a team with the same core values of faith and service, we transitioned from High School to College, and now, as Young Adults, we continue to share our faith while still finding time to playfully goof around.

Guiding the younger generations has become my purpose. I believe in their potential and their capacity to grow into remarkable individuals. Our adult leaders—who are truly the best—encouraged us to be authentic. Whether we are tossing basketballs around during leadership meetings or dreaming up wild ideas, they always embrace our uniqueness.

And then, unexpectedly, my destiny took a turn. I found myself stepping into the role of Youth Minister—a path I never anticipated. Yet, I wouldn't trade it for anything. When Father Brendan's call came, how could I refuse? His voice carried more than mere words; it resonated with God's purpose. The Holy Spirit whispered, urging me back to the place I've always turned to in moments of uncertainty. It felt right, like coming full circle from the very first moments at my kindergarten evaluations.

Our Youth are growing faster than we care to admit. Walking alongside them, witnessing their daily lives, their triumphs, and even their missteps, fills me with joy. Their outrageous questions—some requiring consultations with our Priests to find answers—remind me that they're seekers, destined to ask the right questions and, ultimately, change the world.

This center is more than just 4 walls; it is a sanctuary of hope and possibility. Within these walls, the youth will find comfort, purpose, and a sense of belonging. It is a place where faith blossoms, service ignites, and dreams take flight. Here, they will forge bonds of unity, just like I did, fueled by a shared purpose and a collective desire for spiritual growth.

I Imagine this center as a warm and welcoming home for them. A place where laughter will echo, where doubts find answers, and where hearts are kindled with inspiration, which I cannot wait to be part of.

Today, I invite you as the St Simon community to embrace the role as mentors and guides. Together, we shall guide them in their growth and with our active participation and engagement become the sunlight that nourishes their spirits. Whether you hold skills, wisdom, or simply an open heart, your contribution matters. Each interaction or word of encouragement, becomes a stepping stone in their journey. I ask that you help us weave a tapestry of love, faith, and resilience for them.

As we unlock the doors of this youth center, let us also unlock the limitless possibilities within our youth. May they find strength in their roots, wings in their dreams, and purpose in their hearts.

Together, we build not just a center, but a legacy—a beacon that will guide generations to come, and a guiding light for all to come back to. And as we do so, let us remember that our greatest gift lies not in the bricks we lay, but in the lives we touch.

Over a decade ago, our parish embarked on this center's journey starting with the 'Rooted in Faith' capital campaign. The opening of the youth center was the culmination of unwavering dedication and vision of a committee that sprouted from the hearts of a group of devoted parishioners who recognized the need for this space. Many of you were on this initial council to develop a plan to attract, engage, and retain youth in the life and leadership of the parish. Part of that was to provide this dedicated space where youth can gather, grow and explore their own faith.

I would like to take a moment to express our gratitude to all those who have contributed to this beautiful dream. Thank you to our previous pastors, Father Tony and Father

Warwick, our previous Youth Ministers, some of whom are in this room, and members of the Youth, Pastoral and Finance councils, our talented facilities committee and architects, and of course, Fr Brendan, Victor Ramirez and Joan Mibach that helped to make this beautiful dream reality.

I would like to conclude by again thanking each and everyone of you in the community and invite you to join us at our Ribbon cutting ceremony and celebration as we continue our journey of fostering a supportive and nurturing environment for the young minds of our parish and beyond.

May this youth center forever be a sanctuary of light, love, and transformation.