

My Philosophy of Youth Ministry

By Erwin Van Ramshorst

I believe that God wants to rescue people out of their waywardness and calls them to a life of discipleship.

Contextually, I believe that youth ministry exists to guide youth to see Jesus Christ (encounter), come to know Him intimately (conversion), follow Him intentionally (discipleship), and show Him at work in our lives openly (mission).

When we look at Jesus' example, we see this demonstrated in His ministry through and through. We see how Jesus called what would become His 12 disciples (Mk. 1:16-20), came to know them deeply (Jn. 15:1-4,15), disciplined them to follow Him intentionally (Mt. 24:1-35), and called them to show Him openly (Mk. 6:7-13; Mt 28:19-20). Wherever Jesus went, He called people, knew people, disciplined people, and shared of Himself with people. As we see in Matthew 28, Jesus calls us to live in His footsteps of disciple-making and guide others to encounter, know, follow and share Him.

I believe that at their cores, students, as all people, are inherently good, tainted by brokenness and sin. God created humanity good and whole, in His own image (Gen. 1:26-31), and brokenness and sin entered to shatter this shalom that was originally created (Gen. 3:1-24; Rom. 5:12-14). Students are created good, in God's image, but have fallen away from the original design. They are creation are in need of redemption (Rom. 3:23; Eph. 1:7-10).

Jesus worked this one-two combination of disciple-making and redemption together beautifully in His ministry. We see how He went from spending time with His 12 disciples (Lk. 9:1-9), to the 72 He appointed (Lk. 10:1-24), to teaching and attending to crowds (Lk. 11:29-36). We see how Jesus constantly called people to go deeper. He wanted more for people everywhere He went, calling them to a life of continual growth and depth (Jn. 15:5). We also see how He physically healed and cared for people of all walks of life (Mt. 2:11; 9:10-13), while never failing to attend to the spiritual in people (Mt. 2:5-10). Lastly we see how Jesus equipped and empowered His followers to do the same, and to share in His mission (Jn. 14:15-31). I believe that youth ministry is to reflect this example that Jesus laid out. It is a balance of intentional discipleship and teaching the crowds, a balance of physical and spiritual care, all the while calling people to a deeper life in Him through the Holy Spirit.

Though the practices of Youth Ministries may vary depending on their context, I believe there are fundamental values that all Youth Ministries need to have in common, no matter how they are explicitly stated, in order to be aligned with Jesus mission for the church. These values I have come to state as the "primary values." Besides that are the "secondary values" which I feel passionate about, and have shaped the way I do ministry.

Primary Values

I believe that all ministry needs to be:

1. Prayer-driven: without prayer we can accomplish nothing
2. Gospel-centred: sharing God's truth with student, and how to read the word for themselves.
3. Spirit-led: We don't want to head in a direction contrary to where the Helper wants to guide us. We want to draw on the gifts the Holy Spirit has equipped us with, and find areas we can serve where we are passionate about to create the best
4. Mission-focussed: sharing in Jesus' mission for us together, and spreading the kingdom in the region He has called us.

Secondary Values

I believe that ministry is accomplished in:

A. **Community:** A place of belonging.

- Where everyone is welcome to come as you are.
- Where we are free from judgment.
- Where we are relationally oriented, where small groups are equipped to thrive.
- Where we are allowed to ask any question, express any concern, and share any struggle.
- We accomplish this through a small-group oriented setting, where students are encouraged to branch out and get to know each-other, be authentic with one another, and share in life together.

B. **Growth:** A place of learning.

- Where God's Word and ways are taught clearly and effectively.
- Where we are allowed to try new things, make mistakes, and grow.
- We accomplish this by teaching out of God's Word regularly, as well as challenging and growing their understanding of what it means to follow Jesus at every turn. We also accomplish this by giving students and volunteers the opportunity to lead and serve in various components of the ministry in order to explore and build upon their spiritual gifts and passions.

C. **Outreach:** A place of missional serving.

- Where we care for people, whether they are in our community or not.
- Where we serve together, both in our church community and outside of it, to share God's love and gospel with the world around us.
- We accomplish this by providing opportunities where students can come and serve the community at large and building up a team to lead serving projects. We also accomplish this by equipping students to share their faith with the people around them, and walk with them through the highs and lows as they do so.

D. **Worship:** A place where God is glorified.

- Where we are taught to worship through a variety of worship methods and styles.
- Where we are allowed to authentically express our faith as we feel comfortable and are led to do so.
- We accomplish this by teaching what it means to worship and demonstrating it in our walk with Christ. Furthermore, this is accomplished by providing times and spaces where students are allowed to, and even led to, explore different methods of worship.