Aaron Shelton

Philosophy of Youth Ministry

04.08.11

Dr. Pat Mays

Principles of Youth Ministry
Outline

I. Theology
   A. Bible
   B. What Makes up Mission?
      1. Glorify God
      2. Reach the Lost
      3. Equip Followers
   C. Jesus
   D. Core Values
      1. Be Biblical
      2. For Everyone Through Love
      3. Transformational
      4. Repentance, Forgiveness, and Fellowship
      5. It’s Gonna be Messy

II. Description of Youth Ministry
   A. Vision
   B. Mission Statement
   C. Strategy
      1. Preparatory Approach
      2. Levels of Youth
      3. Examples of Ministry
Since the late 1800’s the western world has been ministering to youth, trying to meet their needs and aid them in their walk with Christ. Yet today we look at our youth programs and often they are small, weak, and diminishing. We can see that when students graduate high school that there is little to no return to a normal church congregation or a college group. What is happening to the youth? What is causing this huge disconnect between youth group and the church? What can we do to stop this rising statistic? Before we address this however, we need to look at mission in youth ministry is and why we do it.

Theology:

The best and most simple place to look when we wish to discover the true meaning of mission is the Bible. I think this is highly overlooked as an relevant and credible source in the church today to show what mission is. I wish to begin by looking into what the Old Testament has to say on ministry and worship. The word obodah is a word that describes work, or labor as a slave or servant involving God. Ministry is all about serving, we see this countless times in the Bible and through the examples of Jesus. We consistently see him in service to others. ὑπηρέτης (hupertes), the Greek word for serving with ones hands, is used constantly through the New Testament when either Jesus or the twelve are serving the church. This is showing us that our mission is to serve others and that we must be servant-leaders in our youth groups and communities. I believe this is one of the best ways to reach a lost youth. In our
Postmodern culture youth are open to hear what you believe, but trying to get them to believe what you do is a much more difficult and grueling task. I see serving as one of those venues into their lives. As I serve they see from the outside looking in that there is something different about me and make them curious as to what makes me unique.

Through this service there are three things that make up our mission, the first is to glorify God. We need to make sure that what we are doing is pleasing to him and lines up with what scripture says about ministry. Second we need to reach out to the lost and hurting. As Proverbs 24:11 says, “Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter.” God has called us to reach out to youth, and in today’s society they are hurting, neglected, and alone. They are dying for attention and are willing to listen to you, if you listen to them. And lastly, we need to equip those youth who are believers to follow us in our footsteps. Our whole goal on this earth is to bring glory to our creator, to show the lost his healing power in grace and forgiveness and to show our youth how to carry on the mission when we are gone.

To further our look into mission, we can look at Jesus and the examples he has shown us about how to conduct ourselves as the Church. Jesus came into this sinful world, as a missionary, and lead his Incarnational ministry. He is the bridge between the spiritual world and the physical world, and our intermediary to the Father on our behalf. When Jesus arrived he began to connect with the people. He learned about
their culture, their language, and began to rise as the perfect King he was. He lived the life of a normal person, he ate the same food and he prayed at the same Synagogue. He was tempted by satin and he remained pure in his walk. He suffered hurt and pain and ultimately death just as we do and will. And in the midst of all of this he didn’t turn away from us and cast us out, he didn’t conform to the patterns of this world, he accepted us and met us where we are and began his work from there. He often showed people the flaws of the church at the time and pointed out weaknesses in religious customs when he saw it was impeding people’s walk with God. He lead by example, showing people love and compassion, healing the sick and lame, and coming and meeting people where they were at, and accepting them where they were. Before Jesus ascended he gave one final commandment, a commandment that every Christian is responsible for, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28: 19-20) Jesus met people where they were and we must do the same with our youth. With this call to minister to the youth I have developed some core values that we must recognize in our youth ministry.
Core Values:

Be Biblical:

To start off, our youth group needs to follow what the bible says. It is one of the few things on this earth that we can trust and lead our youth with. “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17) “These words can help train us in righteousness. By reading God’s words, we can know the mysteries of God; we can know what God is up to.” (Mike Yaconelli, 10) We need to read it within its context and lead with the scriptures and defend the youth against attacks with it. As 2 Corinthians 4:5 says, “For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus sake,” God has equipped us with his own words, we shouldn’t need anything else.

For Everyone Through Love:

We also need to be a youth group for everyone. Acts 15 speaks of how we are all fully God’s people in our culture.¹ No one is more or less deserving of Christ’s love and compassion. Showing the love that Jesus did will only attract more and more people. Jesus knew the hearts of his people and knew they were hurting and longing for something more in their lives, and I believe that we must begin by showing that love in our youth groups.
Transformational:

Next, we need to go into the culture and reach the lost. Our church needs to be able to be transformational in our society. We need to be able to adapt and change with the youth around us and not find ourselves sinking into the edifice complex, bunkering down and trying to “wait out the storm.” Snyder in his book, Radical Renewal,² talks about our God being a God of newness and how it is necessary for us to adopt new wineskins when the time is right. He spoke about the institutional church being one of the biggest roadblocks in our society today and the fact that we are just now beginning to change to meet the needs of the youth doesn’t mean we should stop when the “numbers” of the youth group become ideal. We need to keep up with the times as,

“the church should be the place where we grow old together, so we should work hard to connect our students with the whole church, finding ways to break down the youth ghettos in their separate rooms at the back of the church and connecting the teenagers with all generations in our churches. When the students graduate from our youth programs, their relationships with adults in the church will keep them connected to the church and they will have reasons to stay in the church.” (Mike Yaconelli, 89)

This will keep youth from disconnecting with the church and their faith as they grow and mature in their life.

Repentance, Forgiveness, and Fellowship:

We need to not only preach repentance and forgiveness but practice it. There is great power in repentance and forgiveness and a youths Christian journey can not begin without first asking for forgiveness and repenting for their sins. I believe true healing begins here and without a leader consistently preaching and practicing
repentance and forgiveness, the healing will not happen. Youth today are hurting as the neglect of parents and loved ones sets in. Youth sin just as we do and we as leaders don’t need to hold that over their head or think any less of them, we need to be able to forgive and move on. We also need to be a church with fellowship. Our youth group must be in vertical and horizontal fellowship. They must be vertically in fellowship with our God and King. He must be in charge of their lives and their relationship should be continually growing in him. They also must have a horizontal relationship with others around them. Our youth’s fellowship with each other should be similar to how Jesus had fellowship with his disciples. This fellowship is a foretaste of what heaven will be like and our relationships with each other will bring great healing. This can be either helped or hindered by the church and its programs. In fellowship, we will be able to start working on they body and soul of each individual youth that walks in our door.

*It’s Gonna be Messy:*

*Lastly, the church has to be messy!*

“…it turns out that what disqualifies you and me from “spirituality” – the mess of our lives and our crippledness – is what most qualifies us to be chosen by Jesus… Some of us actually believe that until we choose the correct way to live, we aren’t chooseable, that until we clean up the mess, Jesus won’t have anything to do with us. The opposite is true. Until we admit we are a mess, Jesus won’t have anything to do with us” (Mike Yaconelli, 37)

No youth group is perfect and ministry is far from easy, there will be bumps in the road and mistakes made but the church must keep going, for ministry is a never-ending task that requires lots of time and effort.
Vision:

The vision for my youth group is quite simple. I want the kids that I interact with to engage in an active and flourishing relationship with Christ. I want my ministry to equip and inform youth how to make this happen in their lives and to be a safe place that kids can go to learn about God. In our postmodern world these youth are exposed to hopelessness, depression, and rejection. Parents are more disconnected from their kids than ever and rarely wish to engage in their kids lives. These kids are looking for something to fill the void in their lives and this is where the church plays a huge role in the lives of these youth. Being a place to escape the hurt and pain of this world and find the true healing of Christ.

Mission Statement:

The mission of our youth group should cover five main principles, Doug Fields has an excellent example of this in his book.³ He speaks about how a youth group should be there to evangelize and share the good news of Jesus on the most basic level. It also needs to incorporate worship to celebrate God’s presence and to honor him with our changed lifestyle. It also needs to have fellowship so that youth can be connected and identify with the body of Christ. Next, it must have discipleship to build and strengthen believers in their faith. Lastly, it needs to be a ministry so that we can meet the needs of youth with love. Doug also has a excellent example of what the
mission statement of the church should look like. “Our youth ministry exists to reach nonbelieving students, to connect them with other Christians, to help them grow in their faith, and to challenge the growing to discover their ministry and honor God with their life” (Doug Fields, 57) I can’t agree more with what this statement represents and how every youth program should exhibit this same traits.

*Strategy:*

When I look into how I want my youth group to function and grow, the best example I can think of is a Preparatory Approach. By definition this approach uses the fundamentals of basic youth programs but focus’s more on a ministry based approach other than being based solely on activities. It incorporates a large number of volunteers which is vital for the success of the program. The key to this program is that it isn’t separated from the main church, it is an integration of adults and youth. Communication between the youth groups and leaders in the church are essential. Because of this, the program is mainly shaped by families and parents play a big role in the program. It also prepares youth for present and future roles in the church. But what do these students look like? What are the different stages that youth go through as they grow in the church? There are five levels that the youth go through as they become stronger in their walk with Christ. The outermost level are the Community students, these students are within driving distance of the church but are currently not attending
any church service. Next, is the Crowd level, these students come to a weekly service and have filled out an information card. After that there is the Congregation level that makes up students that have given themselves to Christ and are in a small group. Next is the Committed student level, this level is where the students are serious and committed to growing deeper in their walk with Christ through personal Bible study, prayer, and accountability. Lastly, there is the Core student level. This is where youth have discovered their gifts and express it through ministry to others. Now that we know what the various levels of youth look like, we can look into how each of these groups must be reached differently. Community students are for all we know, not believers. When we want to minister to them we have to remember that we can’t “lure them in and pelt them with the Bible.” We need to have a program that will attract them, often something fun, where they come and enjoy a good time. For example, Doug Fields used a pizza night after the football game. I would use a movie night where the church plays a family friendly movie with free food and a good time. We can lead the program with a prayer and just enjoy the rest of the time with a funny movie and fellowship. I liked Doug’s idea of requiring them to fill out an information card so that you can make each new student a potential Crowd level student. After events like these youth are often more open to attend Crowd level services and see what Christianity is really about, and when asked, are often willing to attend. After this we need to have a program for Crowd level students. A example of this is a weekend service. The service that I attended when I went to church as a youth was a non-traditional service where worship wasn’t boring and mind numbing. According to Doug Fields it needs to be four
things: it needs to be a positive environment, it needs to be fun, it must be student involved, and it requires an understandable message. When we minister to this level we must remember that this is a service for baby Christians and nonbelievers. The message needs to be easy to understand and fun for everyone. Ideally students will continue to grow and reach the Congregation level. At this level there needs to be a program that will nurture believers. In my mind the best way to do this is a Bible study and small group session. This is a place where you nurture and encourage growth in your small group and build relationships with them. “In the early church, fellowship was more relational than recreational.” (Doug Fields, 138) We must keep in mind that relational ministry is far better than just having a lot of fun. We must push our youth to explore their faith and when prompted they often can far exceed our expectations. They often are looking to impress us and work hard when we give them attention. This small group study should grow them into the Committed level. At this level students are encouraged to learn about the Bible, God, and their faith with less guidance from leaders. Here they should be taught how to maintain their faith outside of youth programs and how to grow on their own. Doug split it down to three main things: It needs to be one third educational, where students continue to learn about Christ and their faith. One third must be spiritual disciplines, where the student practices independent spiritual habits such as Bible study and prayer. And one third relational, where the student still interacts in vibrant relationships with other students and leaders. From this level they should be prompted by the Holy Spirit to serve in their congregation and therefore reach the Core level. At this level students are in active and flourishing
relationships with Christ, leaders, and other youth. These youth have discovered that
they are called to serve and are currently serving in the youth, whether that is in music,
media, greeting, or ministering. Here youth leaders should be helping these students
discover their SHAPE, spiritual, and natural gifts and helping them find their place in the
service. With these five levels we can effectively minister to all students, no matter
where they are in their walk with Christ.

To answer my initial questions, the reason there is such a huge disconnect
between graduating students and the church is because often the adults aren’t involved
in the lives of the youth that are in their own congregation. We have to come fourth and
interact and form relationships with our youth so that they feel welcome coming over to
the adult programs of the church. This is a call to parents, elders, students, and leaders
to come together and grow in one another like Jesus did with his disciples when he was
here. We must step up and volunteer our time to these youth as they are currently
the church.
Works Cited


Adapted from:

5. Aaron Shelton’s Philosophy of Ministry.