

Our Approach to Youth Ministry

In the 1940s and 50s parachurch ministries like Young Life and Youth for Christ sprang up. Then in the 1970s churches began *en masse* hiring youth pastors. This trend continues in our day and when a church grows large enough to hire a second staff member the position to be filled is typically that of youth pastor. Yet for all the money and effort that has been poured into youth ministry over the past forty years the results, largely, have been dismal.

Youth ministry has failed to lower the church dropout rate. Lifeway Research found that 70 percent of young people will drop out of church before they reach the age of 23 and by age 30, only 34% of those dropouts will return to regular church attendance (http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/religion/2007-08-06-church-dropouts_N.htm).

Youth ministry has encouraged age segregation in churches. Many church kids regard themselves primarily as members of the youth group rather than as members of the church. The entertainment model of youth ministry has led many kids to view reverent, substantial, God-centered worship as boring. Some churches now have a “youth service” that runs concurrent with the “adult” worship service. Other churches, led by pastors who are themselves products of the youth ministry movement, have scrapped classic worship services, replacing pipe organs with praise bands and Bible exposition with therapeutic talks.

In reaction to the ill effects of the youth ministry movement many churches have completely rejected the idea of having *any* kind of youth gatherings.

Our church seeks to steer a course that avoids the typical pitfalls of youth ministry while not throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Our approach to youth ministry is built on the following considerations:

A teenager’s primary ecclesiastical allegiance should be to the church, not to the youth group. For this reason most of our church programs and activities are age-inclusive, our youth activities are limited, and parents are invited to youth outings. Because the cross of Christ has broken down barriers that once divided people (Ephesians 2:14-16) we want our young people to be integrated into the larger congregation.

God calls the parents, not the church, to be the primary vessel for transmitting the Christian faith to children (Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Ephesians 6:4). Recognizing this we encourage family worship and endeavor to equip fathers to be the spiritual leaders in their homes. Our youth meetings are designed not to supplant, but to support and supplement the efforts of parents.

Most young people long for friendships with other kids and benefit from discussion-based Bible studies. Our youth group provides an opportunity for our young people to build friendships with one another and to discuss, from a biblical perspective, issues that may not receive due emphasis on Sunday mornings.

A Christ-centered youth group can be an effective tool for reaching unbelieving teens for Christ. When a youth group is led by mature adults, when there is substantial Bible teaching, and when the Christian teens in the youth group are welcoming and caring, youth groups typically bear evangelistic fruit.

I came to Christ through a youth group in Sparta, New Jersey as did dozens of other un-churched kids who today are faithfully serving Christ as missionaries, pastors, and committed laity. In the church I pastored before Good News many kids became Christians through the youth group, including a skeptic named Laura who went on to serve with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Papua New Guinea, an out of control kid named Chris who today is a PCA pastor, and some other kids who now serve as elders and deacons in that very church.

We hope and pray that God will use our youth group as a place where the children of our church will be edified by God's Word and enjoy caring friendships with their peers. We also pray that our youth will have an inviting, welcoming posture to kids outside our church.

Peter Kemeny, Pastor
Good News Presbyterian Church
P.O. Box 1051, Frederick, MD 21702
www.goodnews-pres.org