



# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 06

Philosophical  
Foundations of  
Youth Ministry

# **Youth Ministry Training**

## **Lesson Six: Philosophical Foundations of Youth Ministry**

### **Introduction**

#### **Session Overview**

- Why and What Youth Ministry?
- Philosophy of Ministry
- From Philosophy to Model
- Models of Ministry
- From Model to Program

#### **Learner Objectives**

By the end of this lesson, participants should:

- Demonstrate how a philosophy of ministry lends itself to particular models of ministry
- Articulate why ministry models are important
- Identify the various models available
- Implement models based on their current context and beliefs

#### **Introduction**

While many youth workers share a common theological heritage, each local church will have differing views on many of the elements of a philosophy of youth ministry. This session assists you in understanding how one's philosophy of youth ministry directly impacts the model of ministry that guides your efforts.

### **Lesson Body**

#### **“Why” and “What” Youth Ministry?**

Why should the church have youth ministry? What are the most important values that define quality youth ministry? Answering these questions may not always be easy. Many youth workers carry a set of assumptions “in their head” that might be understood as a working philosophy of youth ministry, basically a set of assumptions that justifies and guides their ministry efforts. However, while different youth workers may agree on some reasons for youth ministry, and even on many of the values it should be built upon, we know there is a diversity of opinion on the “why” and “what” of youth ministry. Often, a careful investigation of the basic assumptions helps as we put our implicit assumptions “in writing” and organize our thoughts for a working philosophy of youth ministry.

#### **Philosophy of Ministry**

A youth ministry philosophy, in written form, describes the basic values upon which a youth ministry model and program are built. Basic values include the ideas, and commitments that shape and mold a youth ministry. They reflect what is important, including:

- A theological perspective of ministry
- A view of what is “real” (metaphysics)
- A view of knowledge (epistemology)
- A theological and philosophical view of person
- A view of learning and the nature of teaching
- Leadership roles
- A reason for doing youth ministry
- The basic components of sound youth ministry
- How the components relate to each other
- The place of youth ministry in the whole church’s ministry
- A commitment to proper evaluation.

In sum, philosophy answers the questions, “why have a youth ministry” and “what is youth ministry all about?”

Regardless of our common theological heritage, each local congregation has different views on many of these elements of a philosophy of ministry. A suburban, long-term established Nazarene church may follow very traditional patterns related to issues like leadership styles, the rationale for youth ministry, or the place of youth ministry in the whole church. A smaller, new, inner-city congregation may have very different views on each of these subjects. These differences often surface based on many contextual issues: education level; location of the church; primary socio-economic group present; presence or lack of theological training; etc. These differing beliefs result not just in a differing philosophy of youth ministry, but ultimately different practices of youth ministry from one another.

Norman DeJong created a tool to help us better understand this issue of philosophy of ministry and how it impacts ministry. Visually he created a ladder that guides our climbing. Each “step” influences our rise the next level of questions.

1. Basis of Authority. What is the basis of authority for the ministry philosophy?
2. Nature of persons. What does it mean to be human, and how does this understanding shape a ministry philosophy?
3. Purposes and goals. This is the all-important question of destination. Where should this faith journey take us?
4. Structural organization. Regardless of our context, which path is most likely to take us where we need to go? What supplies will we need to take on the journey?
5. Implementation. How can we use the resources God has provided (both people and materials) to pursue this goal?
6. Evaluation. Understanding that we need to regularly look at where we are, where we are headed, and whether we are still on the right path to get there. Are the goals we’ve established for ministry actually occurring through our efforts?

The first rung deals with the issue of authority: upon whose authority do we do what we do? While that may appear to be a no-brainer, the reality is that too many people are doing youth ministry for reasons other than the fact that God called and empowered them.

The second rung asks us to consider what it is that we believe about the teenagers with whom we're working. Are they inherently good, sinful, or can God work through them regardless, due to God's grace? Do we believe they are the church of today or tomorrow? How do their developmental issues impact our understanding of things such as whether teenagers are capable of assuming leadership, or even being sanctified?

As we continue to climb, the next rung asks us to have the end in sight. Where do we want to go? What does a fully-formed disciple look like? Next, we start addressing how will we get there? This is where we start thinking about specific models of ministry. We'll address this aspect more fully later in this lesson. On the fifth rung, we look at the available resources and consider how we can use them in order to reach the goals we have for ministry and our students.

Lastly, after we have put the ministry model in place, we then closely examine what we are doing to see whether we are meeting the goals we established. If not, then we work to discover why not and what we need to change in order to get there.

The creation of a philosophy of ministry is a time-consuming task. To help you with this task, let's look at a four-phase process developed by Aubrey Malphurs.

- Phase One: Mission—the “Why?” question. Why does the ministry exist?
- Phase Two: Core Values—the “How?” question. How will the ministry conduct its mission?
- Phase Three: Vision—the “What if?” question. This provides a mental picture of what this organization or ministry should look like.
- Phase Four: Strategy—the “What now?” question. How can we accomplish this mission?

Once we have a working idea of what we believe should go into our philosophy of ministry, and the steps to move from philosophy to model, we can examine exactly what a model of ministry looks like.

### **From Philosophy to Model**

A model of ministry tells us what the youth ministry philosophy should look like in real life. It helps us understand how the ideas and ideals of the youth ministry philosophy will be organized. Through the basic components of the model, one should be able to understand what the ministry's philosophy of ministry is about. However, a model is just a conceptualization. While it moves us from philosophy toward the real world, it is only an intermediate step. Models have to be lived out through programs. A program is the detailed, planned activity of the model and philosophy applied to a particular youth ministry in a particular local church. It is the “doing” of youth ministry. In one sense, we can say that our philosophy of ministry establishes our goals while our chosen model of ministry provides the methods by which to reach those goals.

<i>Philosophy of Youth Ministry answers</i>	<i>Model of Youth Ministry answers:</i>	<i>Program for Youth Ministry answers</i>
• WHY have a youth ministry?	• WHAT should a youth ministry look like?	• HOW will our youth ministry operate?
•WHAT is youth ministry all about?		

In choosing a model, your experience of youth ministry and your theological priorities will predispose you to favor some approaches over others. We start with our theology and philosophy of ministry. Then we examine our current context (people and resources). Once we understand it, then we can develop a response to our unique setting and need. The resultant response will be a model of ministry. The model will help ensure we not only are moving toward the goals we laid out in our philosophy of ministry, but will also ensure we are meeting the needs of youth at their various levels of commitment.

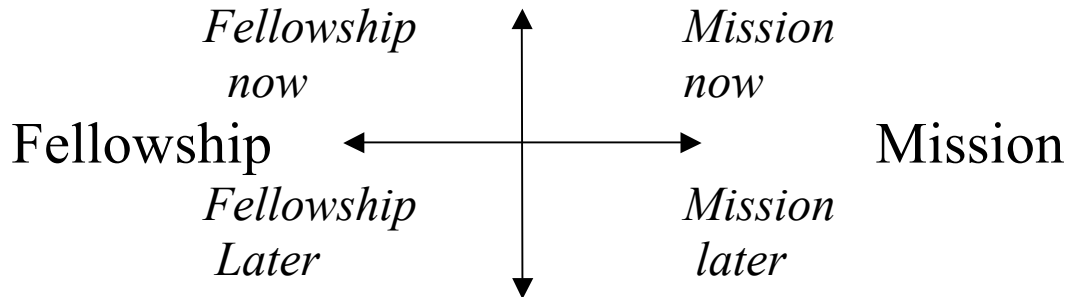
#### *Basics to considering a Model of Youth Ministry*

As we consider what type of model to adopt, there are many things we need to consider. One core issue is an examination of the relationship between fellowship and missiology. In *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church*, Mark Senter notes that Missiologist George Peters frames the discussion as centrifugal versus centripetal approaches to mission. Centripetal draws momentum toward a central point (in this case, the church), while centrifugal strategies spin energy toward the periphery (the non-churched). Historically, church-based ministries have focused on nurture and discipleship (centripetal) while parachurch ministries have concentrated on evangelism (centrifugal).

A second core issue that's important in thinking about a model revolves around developmental issues. "At what stage of a young person's life is it possible for evidences of spiritual maturity to appear; so that, the young person can be a full participant in the life of the faith community? Are there theological issues that prevent adolescents from full participation in the life of the church?" In short, the question becomes, are youth the church of the present or the future?

## Two axes of youth ministry

### Church of the present



### Church of the future

# FELLOWSHIP/MISSION

If you focus more on fellowship than mission but also believe youth are developmentally ready, you will adopt a “fellowship now” approach. If you focus more on mission, engaging the world in youth ministry, but feel youth are not developmentally ready to handle these encounters, you might emphasize “mission later” preferring to focus on training. In considering any model of youth ministry, one must decide where you fall in regard to these two axes.

## *Models of Youth Ministry*

Let's look at three models which have proven themselves particularly helpful in youth ministry.

### *1. Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry—Doug Fields' model*

Drawing from the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) and the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-39), Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Community Church, has suggested that there are five primary purposes that all churches should practice. Doug Fields, the youth pastor at Saddleback, has applied these five purposes to youth ministry, as found in his book, *Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry*:

- Evangelism
- Discipleship
- Ministry
- Fellowship
- Worship

This model of ministry seeks to create programs and ministries which give students at all levels of commitment the opportunity to engage each of these purposes.

### *2. Christian Practices—Kenda Creasy Dean, Mark Yaconelli, Tony Jones, Mike King, Dorothy Bass' models*

One growing model advocated by a number of current youth ministry specialists begins with the assumption that ministry occurs primarily through practices or disciplines that shape the spiritual life, rather than through general activities or programming. Particular attention is given to basic spiritual disciplines such as worship, celebrating communion, prayer, scripture reading, compassionate service and witness. The primary ministry focus in this approach is to teach youth to appreciate and engage in different spiritual formation disciplines as individuals and as groups. Kenda Dean and Ron Foster note, as youth participate in the soul-shaping practices of faith, their life begins to look like Jesus' life. In many ways, these practices define the shape and call of Christian living. A major goal is to encourage young people to develop a "rule of life" or series of commitments to maintain both certain Christian values and specific spiritual disciplines that both cultivate youth devotion and guide their witness in the world. Mike King writes "A rule of life is an intention to place Jesus Christ at the center of life, community and ministry."

### *3. Incarnational-Relational—Andrew Root's framework*

While the previous models rely primarily on programming or practices, one other prominent approach begins with relations, particularly between adults and youth (but sometimes also between young people themselves.) This model trusts that Christ becomes manifest in the middle of open, honest relationships shaped by Christian intention and guided by the Holy Spirit. As noted in the previous lesson, Andrew Root, cautions that relationships must take seriously the lives of youth and calls for creating a space or place, where youth can authentically share their pains, hopes, and passions. Root writes "Just as Jesus incarnate, crucified and resurrected was fully our place-sharer, so we too, as Jesus' disciples, must ourselves become place-sharers, suffering with and for young people. When we rethink and reimage relational youth ministry as

place-sharing, we will be able to see human-to-human relationships as the location of God's presence in the world, and therefore honor the broken and yet beautiful humanity of adolescents (and ourselves!).” Ministers in this model trust that Christ may work not only through adults but also through youth, even those who have yet to embrace the gospel. Root offers the following guidelines that provides a sound beginning for this approach, the he titles: Rules of Art for Meaningful Relationships as the Presence of God.

- The youth worker should have a connection to all adolescents in the congregation but be in a relationship with a few.
- All adolescents should be invited into relationships of place-sharing.
- The youth worker is to support, encourage and assist adult and adolescent relationships of place-sharing.
- Relationships should be built around shared interests or a common task.
- Relationships should develop as organically as possible, in which adults are authentically human (in an open-and-closed manner) alongside adolescents.

As one might imagine, each of these models acknowledge that programs, practices and people are all important in youth ministry. However, in each model, one of these domains guides the efforts of youth ministry more than the other two emphases. Where one begins, and what one trusts makes the most difference, establishes the model.

### **Models to Programs**

Unfortunately, many youth workers find themselves in churches or other settings with programs already in place. At other times, we experience a lot of pressure to “do something” about an issue by starting a new program. Unfortunately, we often inherit, or create, programs that do not fit our overall design for ministry. If we have a good working model of ministry we can gradually adjust programs to match our philosophy of ministry. We are in much better shape when we have a working model first, then select programs that match our goals and structure.

Choosing a model of ministry that fits us is not as easy as one might think. It requires us to ask good questions.

1. Does the church have a distinctive philosophy of ministry that must be reflected in the youth ministry?
2. How well developed are the communication skills of the youth worker, especially in front of large groups?
3. How competent are the organizational skills of the youth worker?
4. How adept is the youth worker at meeting and gaining a hearing from non-Christian students?
5. What kind of vision does the church have for ministering to the community immediately surrounding the church building?



6. How strong are the family ties within the church, especially as they relate to spiritual nurture?
7. To what extent are mature and talented adults available to implement the model selected?
8. Are the students presently in the youth group sufficiently eager to make the changes necessary to implement a model that would have a significant spiritual impact on their lives?
9. What kind of facilities and resources does the church have that would enhance or weaken the model chosen?
10. Does the model chosen emerge from your personal philosophy of ministry?

While choosing a model is important, once the model is chosen it is equally important we continue to use our philosophy of ministry to continue to guide us.

Have any of you ever driven a tractor to plant seeds? When you do, it is important that you find a point on the horizon to aim for, and keep your eyes on it the whole way in order to have a straight row. If you don't, when you get to the end of the row and look back, you'll probably discover that your row looks like a geometric figure. The same thing is true once we've picked our model. We still have to look at individual practices within that model and determine whether they fit the elements of our philosophy of ministry. Once we have established the model and put into place our programs and ministries, we then have to do good evaluation to determine whether the model and practices are moving us where we wanted to go. That means that we have to plan ahead with our key principles in mind. We have to know when (and why) to say "yes" and when to say "no" to ministry programs and activities, as not all programs (even really good ones) are the best fit for our context and philosophy of ministry.

### **Application**

Write down four "big ideas" that guide your philosophy of ministry. Can you provide a "working" philosophy of ministry that you could explain to another youth worker or volunteer in five minutes or less? Try to create one.

Work on your model of youth ministry. Answer the following questions as you think about your local church:

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### **Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

*Do you think it's important to really address all of the issues described in a philosophy of youth ministry? After all, it's only youth ministry.*

*In your opinion, should all Nazarene churches adopt the same philosophy of ministry? Why or why not?*

*How does your context influence your philosophy of youth ministry?*

*Can you answer the "why," "what," "how," "what if," and "what now" of your youth ministry?*



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