

Faith Pulpit

The Mission Field of Youth

The statistics shout the facts. Over one-third of the population of the United States is under the age of 21. There are over 31 million teenagers in this country alone. The youth of America are a large mission field. Pure numbers alone indicate that teens desperately need to be reached by effective and relevant ministries.

The enormous number of young people is staggering; yet, those figures pale in comparison with those of the previous two decades. Even though the actual percentage of teenagers in America is dwindling the pressure facing adolescents are growing.

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death among teenagers today. That is second only to accidents, of which most are alcohol related.
- Over 70% of high school students in the United States are actively involved in sexual immorality.
- Over 50% regularly use drugs. Over 85% are said to drink alcoholic beverages regularly.
- Teens spend over eight hours each day listening to rock music and watching television.

The teens of America are a large and needy mission field. There are fewer young people in this country than there were a few years ago, but those current statistics and the influences of modern society demand that the church of the twentieth century act now to reach the “ripened harvest” of today’s youth.

Current trends in youth ministry rest the burden of effective evangelism and outreach to para-church agencies. However, this approach violates God’s mandate of reaching the next generation through the local church. Even churches within our fellowship have delegated their ministry to youth to organizations and publishers that have flourished during the past few years.

Several youth and children's organizations seek to support the church and to help the church reach the next generation for Christ. The problem arises when individual local churches use those agencies as substitutes to meet the needs very evident in today's culture.

There are needs today. Teenagers desperately need answers to life's problems and pressures. When churches look to outside groups to meet those needs they are forfeiting one of their biggest and most profitable blessings, that is, seeing their young people develop loyalty to their own church and youth group. One of the dangers presented by a para-church organization is that the teens tend to be loyal to that organization and not to the local church. Therein is the problem.

History and modern culture have shown that other organizations or agencies are helpful "tools" for use by the local church; however, the church is God's method for reaching the world for Christ. It must never lean on the crutch of para-church ministries, but instead use tools to be more effective in its commission.

When the local church places its ministry to youth into the hands of an outside group, it is risking the loss of the above mentioned loyalty to that group. How then can the church effectively minister to the young people of the 1980s?

1. Establish a Biblical Purpose

Ephesians 4:11–16 clearly identifies the purpose of local church ministries. Briefly stated, it is to produce people with spiritual maturity for a life of service for Christ. That is a Biblical requirement. Local church youth ministries then should have this purpose at their core. The goal must be to produce teens who are ready and prepared for a life of service for Jesus Christ. This would then prohibit the church from using tools which subvert this stated purpose.

2. Develop a Biblical and Practical Philosophy

Philosophy could be defined as "why we do things the way we do them." It is the development of reasons behind actions. Local churches should ask, "Why have a ministry to youth?" and should define a set of proper objectives. A philosophy contains two necessary ingredients; a specific and well-thought objective and means for obtaining that object. This would also limit the church from using organizations or methods which do not fit its previously stated philosophy.

3. Agree on Godly Priorities

Once the church has established its purpose and a workable philosophy of youth ministry, then it should agree on a set of Biblical priorities. Too often the church simply takes the priorities of a curriculum publisher or other organizations without thinking through a set of priorities on its own. Perhaps the youth pastor or youth workers, the pastor, the deacons, parents of teens and even the teens

themselves could develop a written list of Godly priorities for their church's youth ministry. That list might include items such as an emphasis on parents, an evangelistic push, solid music, service opportunities, etc. Once the list of priorities has been agreed on, then the youth workers could look to publishers and other organizations for help in reaching those priorities.

4. Organize an Effective Program

After taking the time to work through the above listed principles, it is then time to organize and administrate an effective program for teens. This program would include Sunday School, youth group, prayer, socials, outreach, ministry opportunities and all of the other activities necessary for a real ministry to youth.

The church is God's method for reaching the world for Christ. That does include youth ministry. The teenagers of today are facing very serious problems and struggles. An effective youth ministry takes time, effort and consistency, but it is worth it. Local churches must be reproducing themselves in the lives of the next generation.

Churches can take advantage of solid, conservative and doctrinally-correct organizations and agencies. However, these must not take the place of the local church. These groups are to be tools only.

FBBC&TS appreciates the work of Regular Baptist Press and the ministry of the GARBC with their Talents for Christ and Youth Days' emphases; however, each church is responsible to establish a practical, workable and Biblical ministry with its own teens.

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Mel has served in various pastoral and teaching roles and has inspired countless students through his commitment to biblical truth and practical ministry skills. A respected author, Mel's work emphasizes the importance of discipleship and mentoring in the lives of young Christians. He has also written books focused on guiding teens and young adults in their spiritual journeys.