

Models of Young Adult Ministry in the Penn-Del District

Models of Young Adult Ministry Taken from Pennsylvania

After interviewing pastors and leaders from nearly eight percent (f=27) of the churches in Pennsylvania and Delaware, it was discovered that a number of churches are implementing various strategies to try to impact the lives of young adults with the gospel. The varied strategies described below, could provide real live models from within the district.

Young Adult Sunday School

Several of the pastors mentioned that their churches have Sunday school classes for post high school students. In many of the classes, a key element is providing a place of dialogue. When the post high school students feel they have a safe and private place to ask their questions, they come back. The classes have been filled with their peers, and themes have been discussed that are pressing to them. The age of the teacher seems less important than if he or she is prepared and qualified to be leading the class. Where the teacher has served as facilitator of discussion and discovery, the young adults have returned more often to the class.

Worship Services

Other pastors are attracting young adults through worship services specifically geared for that age group. These services are held weekly, bi-weekly, or on a monthly basis. The services are generally led by younger people who appear more laid back, Bible study is taught by someone who communicates well with this age group. The music is non-traditional. The host Assembly serves food, as well as a time for fellowship.

Providing them with a Starbuck-quality café seems to provide a welcoming atmosphere

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Excerpts from pages 43-48 and Appendix I of Thesis

Edited by Joseph Barrale April 30, 2009

where they can develop friendships which they can nurture outside the doors of the church. At these services other mid-week gatherings such as small group Bible studies, marriage preparation classes, and meetings for mothers are offered.

Bridge Building Social Activities

Fifteen percent (f=4) of the pastors shared how they plan social events on a regular basis for their young adults. These include activities such as bowling, hiking, sport events, dodge-ball tournaments, trips to corn mazes, dinners at fine restaurants, laser tag, rock climbing, and trips to diners.

Volunteer Community Service

Post high school students often find that even young people who do not profess Christianity are willing to participate in community service and be involved in helping others. Many Assemblies are providing opportunities for volunteer service. Mission trips or community service activities are planned locally, or, in not too distant places. They help provide house repairs or garden work for the ill, elderly or single parents.

Collaborating with Nearby Churches

In one area of Pennsylvania, three or four churches get together once every month in a non-church setting. Young adults meet around round tables; have musicians, speakers, and discussions of pertinent topics. The Assemblies that hold these meetings are currently drawing 200-300 hundred young adults.

In another area of Pennsylvania, several churches worked together to provide a young adult weekend. They brought in well-known musicians who held a concert on a Friday night. The rest of the weekend the Assemblies offered teaching, training, and relational activities. Nearly three hundred people attended.

Campus Ministry

Still others take their ministry directly to the college campus. One church is currently holding church services on a local college campus. The Assembly has a small group meeting for students. The participants sit at round tables with a facilitator who encourages discussion. The Assembly has taken an old crank washing machine, placed it in the foyer of their church to collect quarters throughout the month. When first-time visiting students come, each receives a roll of quarters to help them do their laundry. After a relatively short time nearly fifty students are coming to the meetings.

Another church has a young adult director, who helps to coordinate Sunday school classes for those who are college/career age. The director makes sure activities also take place every third Friday of the month on the local university campus. They try to provide a variety of opportunities for young adults to experience God. At the campus meetings, the church sponsors events such as open mike nights when local young people can share their poetry, diverse styles of songs, or drama. Other times, the evening is focused on prayer or the Word of God. Once a year, they collaborate with other churches in the area to hold a festival that has many creative elements. It continues to build momentum and has proven to be a great way to bring the gospel to the streets of Newark via the young adults.

Gift Packages

Initiated by an older woman, one church makes up Christmas packages to be distributed on the local campus. The church has received permission from the college administration to use a room situated on campus from which church members can pass

out the gift packages. They include things such as pens, paper, mints, candy bars, gum, and an evangelistic book.

Hanging Out

One young pioneer pastor makes a point of meeting students at locations where students like to gather. He goes to the campus, dorm rooms, campus café, or restaurant and just hangs out with them. Through this approach, he builds relationships.

Simple Invitations

One large church makes it a habit of sending someone from their church to distribute invitations. The church members make sure that they stand where there is a heavy flow of students passing. The invitations are for social type events as opposed to meetings that are blatantly evangelistic. The purpose of the invitations is to build relationships by providing non-evangelistic events.

Non-traditional Church Services

One large church, although not specifically targeting young adults, draws close to three hundred young people each week. The church is careful to stay biblically sound and provide consistent Bible teaching. The pastoral staff dresses casual. The sermon is delivered from a bar stool, and various service times are offered.

Within this church, a middle-aged lady teaches classes in her home and on the local campus. She teaches in her expertise on relational skills. Her meetings draw close to thirty young people. The purpose of these meetings is to build relationships and open dialogue on issues of faith.

Young Adults in Church Leadership

In one smaller church, nearly half the congregation is between the ages of eighteen to thirty years old. These young adults are included on the church leadership board. They are represented in church decisions and, as such, help the church to present the gospel in a way that is also relevant to them.

Generational Bridges

Finally, one church converted an old youth chapel into a coffee shop. During one Friday night per month, they serve non-alcoholic mixed drinks, coffee, desserts, and sandwiches. The person mixing the drinks had been a professional bartender. The church members invite local artists to share their music, poems, or paintings. At this point, they have had all ages in attendance. The coffee house atmosphere seems to be providing a place for people from different generations to build relationships with one another.

A Few Examples of Other Young Adult Ministries in Pennsylvania

A number of young adult ministries in Pennsylvania are having an impact on young adults. Some have been in existence for decades, while others have been formed over the last several years.

One such ministry takes place in Wayne, Pennsylvania. For several decades, the local church has made it a point to provide weekly services for young adults. The church holds meetings for various age groups. For example, Quest is a group of young adults between the ages of eighteen to twenty five. Epic is for post college age up to thirty five. Common Creed is for people thirty to forty. They meet on a weekly basis and have been drawing hundreds of young adults for many years.

Another ministry in a local church in the Exton area appears to be concerned with reaching young people is a ministry called “The Bridge.” This church group draws nearly two hundred young adults each Sunday evening. They provide a non-traditional worship service followed by small groups which are specifically geared to young adult topics. Small-group opportunities are available every day of the week. Some of the groups are very specialized in that they may be just for women, young adults with children, or just for men. Community service opportunities are also offered.

Journey is a young adult ministry connected to another local church. The church provides a mid week Bible study which is specifically geared to young adults. Additionally, outreach opportunities are provided for the purpose of helping the needy in the community as well as overseas.

As stated in one of the sub-problems of this study, examining other organizations which are ministering to young adults could provide ideas in the process of developing more effective strategies for the Pennsylvania-Delaware District of the Assemblies of God (PDD) (see appendix I). Concrete examples from the PDD provide models that could possibly be duplicated.

APPENDIX I

A LOOK AT OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Campus Crusade for Christ

Campus Crusade for Christ is a ministry that brings the gospel to more than one thousand college campuses. They record over 3,400 students involved in their local chapters. Nationwide they have over thirty four hundred staff members. They also have specific outreaches to athletes on campus. They use things such as websites, handing out freshman survival kits, and weekly Bible studies. They also make it their aim to provide relevant resources to local churches. At Christmas time and in the winter they hold special conferences. As many as eleven thousand students participated in these conferences last year. At these conferences, which are held regionally, speakers challenge the audience in their walk with Christ, organize late night hangouts, sponsor concerts, and conduct evangelism in the host community.

Intervarsity

Intervarsity is a college campus ministry that was established in 1941, currently serving over 35,000 students on 560 campuses nationwide. They emphasize witnessing on campus, discipleship, and world mission involvement. They also have special fellowships for students studying to be nurses. They have several training centers across the country in which over twenty thousand students participate annually. There they focus on building a relationship with God and hope to equip people for Christian service. They also have a publishing company and publish about ninety books each year.

Campus Ministry Research.

Brad Lewis who works as a church staff person and full fledged Chi Alpha (XA) pastor in Fargo, North Dakota recently spoke at a XA training session in Springfield, Missouri (Lecture, June 2007). He said that Campus Crusade leadership recently researched the status of the graduates of their campus ministries, tracking them five years after graduation. They discovered that nearly 80 percent of these students were no longer serving God. Among the Campus Crusade leadership they are asking themselves what they want the life of the student to look like five years after graduation. Because campus ministry tends to take place primarily detached from the life of the local church, it is not surprising that, upon graduation they find themselves outside the realm of Christian community. It would appear that becoming detached from the local church during the college years is a key factor in the eventual spiritual deterioration of the individuals.

The AG

Dennis Franck (2007) tells us that prior to the year 2000, there was little or no formal training for reaching young adults in the AG fellowship besides the XA ministry which as mentioned before, primarily focusing on university students. He also states that in our twenty-one AG colleges, courses that teach on how to effectively minister to young adults are almost non-existent. Since 2000, Dennis Franck has been appointed to develop and facilitate young adult ministries in the AG nationwide. They have developed a website with various resources, recommended reading material, upcoming events, and contact information to help connect people ministering to this age group.

Mars Hill

One very large ministry is reaching hundreds of young people each week. They call themselves Mars Hill and are located in Grandville, Michigan. The original church meets in Seattle, Washington. They meet in non-traditional buildings with very simple décor. There is heavy emphasis on being genuine in one's walk with Christ and a backing away from producing a "professional" service with lots of cheerleading type response. They believe the role of the church is to go out and serve the community, not programs. The original Mars Hill church in Seattle began by targeting the young adults but soon realized that young adults get married and start families. It also became evident that these young adults needed the influence of mature believers who could model the Christian faith in terms of a healthy marriage, parenting, and all the normal areas of life. Although they abandoned the idea of just targeting young adults, the majority of those who attend their churches are in their "twenty's." The church also conducts small home community groups. Pastor Mark Driscoll believes it is crucial that people are in small enough groups where they can be "known, loved, and sharing the gospel with lost friends" (2006, 179).

Needy people in their communities are also helped on an ongoing basis through building and mentoring projects. They give twenty five percent of their income to help the needy in other places of the world. Young adults have the opportunity to serve their community and world. This genuine love expresses Christianity in a way that is a strong contrast to what is sometime portrayed by the media or in other churches they have experienced that promote the "what can Christianity do for me" mentality.

Mosaic

Mosaic is a church in the Los Angeles area that has a church based young adult ministry. Small groups for students are provided on various campuses throughout the city as well as for those who are already in the workforce. They also provide special ministry opportunities for those who are involved in the arts. The artists (dancers, painters, musicians, and poets) have opportunities to use their creative gifts in the context of worship and ministry outreach. Special emphasis is placed on being part of the community, and their aim is to show the love of Christ through various community service oriented outreaches.

Lisa Johnson says that young adults born between the years of 1980-1997 have a passion for social justice and a burning desire to make a difference. She goes on to say that this generation is donating more of its time to charitable causes than any other generation in history (2006, 221). The Mosaic Church and Mars Hill seem to substantiate her comments.

The Crucial Link of the Local Church

After looking at each of the movements mentioned above, it would appear that their strength is only as strong as the people who are actively involved on the local level through the local church. When churches have ministries established for young adults, they are more likely to retain the transitioning teens that were part of their youth groups. These transitioned teens continue to be disciplined and become the missionaries who can reach out to non-believing peers, whether on the college campus or in the workplace. Of importance is the relevance of the work of the local church as they accompany the young adult through this very crucial season of life and help them to develop a strong and

healthy Christian worldview. Having been accompanied through these important years, they are then able to move into full adulthood and become the next generation of leaders in the local church.

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