

PASSIONATE DISCIPLESHIP

Six Foundational Ideas for
Youth Ministry in Canada

A CB Youth Initiative

TABLE OF CONTENTS

From One Youth Worker to Another	3
How this Resource is Organized.....	4
Messy Community	5
Spiritual Disciplines.....	11
Spiritual Companions.....	17
“ <i>Glocal</i> ” Compassion	22
Critical Thinking and Cultural Engagement.....	28
Commitment to the Local Church.....	34
About CB Youth	38

FROM ONE YOUTH WORKER TO ANOTHER

The tectonic plates of youth ministry are shifting. Many of us are starting to have significant questions about the way we are doing things. Are we really making disciples? Are we equipping a generation able to give faithful witness to the gospel in a fragmented world?

For some, it's the issue of young adults leaving the church, and wondering how to help them relate to church after their years in youth groups. For others, it's the issue of how to create a "new way" in youth ministry, and wondering if this new way is really just a way of being the church.

Regardless of the questions, if we can help our youth leaders do a better job at discipleship, we believe we will have made a worthy contribution. We recognize that the challenge is huge, but we want to be part of the leading voices who embrace the challenge and offer ideas that are practical and inspirational. May it be part of what spurs us on to a life of faithful and thoughtful ministry.

The CB Youth Team is a group of youth directors from all four regions in Canada, in partnership with Canadian Baptist Ministries (CBM). We oversee youth ministry initiatives across the country, as well as a few overseas. We spend a lot of time visiting with youth workers, and have learned a lot from you as you have shared your stories with us.

We are writing this resource for youth workers of every stripe, whether volunteer or paid, new or veteran, from small or big churches. We recognize the magnitude of all you do as a person who invests in the lives of young Canadians. You invest time in these students and you are challenging them to be followers of Jesus in the midst of a culture that screams at them to sell out, act out and check out.

Thank you for what you do, and may Jesus grant you joy in the journey as you continue to help this next generation of believers live out "a long obedience in the same direction," to borrow a phrase popularized by Eugene Peterson.

HOW THIS RESOURCE IS ORGANIZED

Six Foundations of Passionate Discipleship: Each chapter will start with a conversation about specific elements we believe to be central to making passionate disciples. These are not new, they don't all rhyme, nor do they all start with "P," but we hope they will get you thinking.

Case Studies: One of the reasons for putting this resource together was to share stories of churches that are living out these foundations. Here's where we need your help! Please share a story that brings to life how these movements of passionate discipleship are happening in your youth ministry context. Send stories to the Global Discipleship Development department at CBM (communications@cbmin.org). Thanks in advance for being part of this organic document.

Critical Thinking Questions: We hope this resource is something you can use with other youth leaders as a catalyst to discover how your ministry might be more effective in making disciples.

Recommended Resources: In some cases, we have included further resources that might be helpful to you at the end of the chapter. These lists are not exhaustive but will give you an outlet if you want to do some follow up study and reading.

Passionate Discipleship

Six Foundations

Foundation #1

MESSY COMMUNITY



FOUNDATION #1

Passionate Disciples Develop Their Faith in the Midst of Messy Community

Messy Community Defined

Our journey through life begins in mess. We enter the world through the pain of childbirth, are included in families that experience fatigue and stress, and face the uncertainty of the future.

The characteristics of mess are universal – sloppiness, unkempt appearance, odour, confusion, lack of direction, disorganization – does this remind you of your university roommate? It might remind you of some of the youth and young adults you are serving in your ministry. It might even remind someone of you!

In our context, however, mess means more than dirty rooms or smelly socks. It means more than a confused high school student or a dishevelled young adult. Messy community IS the defining characteristic of this millennial generation.

I'll attempt to define messy community. Messy community consists of broken homes (almost 40 percent of all marriages end in divorce¹), addictive behaviour (pornography, substance abuse, gambling, etc.), identity crises, political uncertainty, dying churches, relational tragedies, stress from work, home, school, family, health, and debt! There...I said them...the major issues that occupy our days and cloud our thinking and which define many of those we are called to serve. Ministry in this generation is messy.

With messy community defined I would like to explore the following questions. How do we live within the "mess" of messy community? Can we recognize God's perfection as he enables us to become passionate disciples through messy community? And, how do we recognize a passionate disciple when they are living in God's purpose and will within messy community?

Living in the Mess

When thinking of Christians in messy community who have persevered and been restored or died a martyr of the faith, one often thinks of Job. Job endured great pain and anguish, yet emerged as a passionate disciple of God. After all of the suffering he went through, Job cried out to God, "You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me. My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.'" (Job 42:4-6) Scripture tells us that with that confession, God restored Job's assets and his happiness.

¹ <http://www.imfcanada.org/default.aspx?go=article&aid=1182&tid=8>, Wed., Dec. 16, 2009

I remember the story of Jason, a kid in my youth group. His mom and dad had been divorced since he was three. He grew up in poverty, living in a mobile home park with his mom and grandfather, neither of whom was employed. Jason attended school with students in the group, which allowed him to experience life on an even playing field. However, most of the kids in our group were born into upper middle class families and enjoyed the finer things in life. It was obvious to Jason that although he felt at home in the context of our group most of the time, there were certainly differences in the opportunities available to him, compared with the opportunities of the other students. He often struggled with whether or not he belonged. No matter how much we assured him that he was a part of our “family,” he was in constant identity confusion.

Jason’s community was messy. Much of the time, youth and young adults that find themselves in messy community like this have little or no control over their life’s circumstances. But the crucial dynamic is that Jason did indeed belong in this community. As confusing and messy as it was, he belonged.

Jason found significant spiritual comfort in our community. He embraced the community’s dynamics, participated fully when on campus and on trips, and found faith to be very comforting in his life of messiness. Jason found Christ in the context of our community and was baptized in the Nolichucky River in western North Carolina on a youth group white water rafting trip. Jason lived in, found relational significance in, and began a lifelong faith journey as a passionate disciple of Christ within messy community.

The most passionate disciples often emerge from messy community. History tells us of significant spiritual campaigns that have been born out of persecution and exile. Within this messy community of our youth and young adults, what significant spiritual campaign will be next? I suggest that passionate disciples are born out of messy community.

Recognizing God’s Perfection

As we find ourselves in messy community, God has proven time and time again that what was created in us is exactly God’s plan for us. The perfection in each of us can be extracted or launched in the midst of messy community. Benjamin Franklin once wrote, “Hide not your talents, they for use were made. What’s a sundial in the shade?” I agree. The talents and perfection we possess were intricately created by the God of the universe and can be used in and despite our circumstances.

I preach a sermon periodically called “Where You Are is Why You’re There.” I’ll give you a minute to think that one through before we continue. The premise is that God has placed us in our current demographic/geographic/relational spot so that he might use our gifts to care for, share with and develop relationships with people. But God has also provided people who will come alongside us, merge with us in speed and intention, and teach us things about ourselves. In this spot, God actively provides opportunities for us to use the perfection placed in us and to be sharpened by those around us.

In Acts 8, Philip encounters an Ethiopian official struggling to understand the book of Isaiah. After nudges from the Holy Spirit, Philip walks him through the prophecy he is reading and explains its

fulfillment in Jesus and the need to be radically changed. The official asks to be baptized by Philip right there on the road to Gaza. Philip, just on a journey from one place to the next, finds himself being used to do just what God had designed him to do – share the gospel with others.

In a dramatic twist, Philip disappears from the scene only to find himself farther north in Azotus. Scripture tells us that Philip then preached the gospel there and along the way until he arrived at his intended destination. In a routine situation – a walk to the next town – God provided perfection. In the literal mess of a hot, long walk, the metaphorical mess of life among strangers, and the vocational mess of “am I really cut out to preach the gospel?” Philip realized that he was exactly where he needed to be for God to use him – and to teach him about the perfection of reaching others that God had placed in him. I would contend that Philip, who was martyred for his faith, was a passionate disciple regardless of the circumstances that surrounded his life and work.

I often think of Tina. Tina was a student who, in the midst of life struggles as a teenager (bad parent relationship, drinking, following the crowd, etc.), was used by God in a mighty way. Tina began coming to our youth ministry with a friend. On the second night, Tina was asked to lead in a prayer time, something she had never done before. Though nervous, she proceeded to lead this short time of gathering prayer requests and then lead the group in prayer. She was overwhelmed to be asked in the first place, but as she reflected back on the night, she realized that she felt in a sweet spot of sorts during the task and in subsequent weeks of leading prayer. Tina recognized her gifts and became a leader before she ever gave her life to Christ. A passionate disciple was born out of the mess of a sixteen-year-old teenager who, according to her own self-profession, was “far away from God” at the time. Tina later served at the Portland Promise Center in inner-city Louisville, Kentucky, doing youth and community ministry.

Passionate disciples don't always turn out to be ministry leaders. Many live out a positive, dynamic faith while integrated into culture. Bryson never missed anything happening at church. He was dependable, conscientious and a “good ole boy” to the core. However, Bryson, and the rest of us, knew that he wasn't cut out for vocational ministry. Bryson is now a civil engineer providing information technology support to his firm of engineers. He is a passionate follower of Christ who gives generously to the work of the gospel, to students and adults alike, and every year considers making his vacation time a work trip to benefit a village or church or family somewhere in the world. Bryson would never be considered a great speaker or a great teacher of Christ's life, but he does live like Christ lived and serves like Christ served. Ask anyone who knows him.

Passionate disciples can recognize and find their perfection in the midst of messy community. Finding ways to extract the perfection and create opportunities for it to be used is a joint effort between ministry workers like you who are youth leaders and the individuals themselves. God's perfection is always available for our use. Just like the water reservoir is always available for the fire hydrant, God's perfection is always a twist or tweak away from being fully recognized, fully utilized and fully blessed.

The ID of a Passionate Disciple

So, the question becomes, do I rest in the identity of a passionate disciple? Or, do these

students look like passionate disciples from the inside out and outside in? The constant struggle of a youth ministry worker is how to determine if someone is fully following Christ with their life and striving to be a passionate disciple. In the last portion of this chapter, I'll include my only plug for programming and youth ministry strategies: small groups!

We obviously look to Christ when trying to identify a passionate disciple. If we look closely at Christ's life in ministry we find that he was consistently surrounded by people. With a closer look, we realize that he was surrounded by the same group of people. During the difficult times he surrounded himself with Peter, James and John. Christ belonged to a small group. His small group prayed with him, knew intimate things about him and called him out on certain things too (Christ always won the argument however!) I would say that they knew Christ best because of their significant relationship with him.

Identifying a passionate disciple of Christ requires time and a commitment to regularly exploring the growth of the individuals within the context of the group. In my own small group, it is easy to identify those people who are passionately following God with their lives and even easier to identify those who are not. I certainly try hard to follow Christ with my own life, but I listen intently to the comments of others in my small group regarding the sincerity of my identity as a disciple. If others, especially close friends, believe that I am following Christ passionately, I listen to them because they see the results in my life over the course of our relationship. This will certainly hold true in the lives of youth and young adults. If there is a pattern of accountability and challenge that lasts for a lengthy period of time, then our identity as a passionate disciple of Christ is clear. And if we are not actively following Christ with our lives, it is even clearer.

Making small groups with students work is quite a challenge. There are hundreds of curricula for ministry workers to use. I would suggest finding one that fits your group best. A more important observation and suggestion regarding small groups and their effectiveness is that the success of a small group often hinges on the commitment and effectiveness of its leader. As a pastor, I was adamant that all student small groups were student-led. These students were mentored by me or another leader, and were in constant training with an adult in a leaders' small group that provided modelling of an effective small group. For those involved in leading small groups, there was consistent defining of their faith and of their identity as a passionate follower of Christ. Our small group ministry produced many passionate disciples of Christ. Many of the passionate disciples weren't in fact the leaders but the participants that sought small group community to enhance, perfect and direct their life as a passionate disciple. And it worked!

Go and Be Great

You've read my thoughts on how I believe passionate disciples are formed within messy community. Despite our life station or swirling confusion, we can emerge as passionate disciples. I would also suggest that we are often made stronger by the mess. Get at it...get messy and become passionate followers of Christ. Lead well, participate well in those small groups and help one another create, support and consistently evolve into passionate disciples!

We're looking for real life examples of this! Please send your stories and photos to:
communications@cbmin.org

Critical Thinking Questions:

1. Based on your own context, define messy community.
2. List here and provide commentary on situations you've observed where messy community actually sharpened the faith identity of a passionate disciple of Christ that you know.
3. In your opinion, what are the three identifying characteristics of a student who is a passionate disciple of Christ?
4. How did God's perfection emerge in your own life despite messy community? Are you still seeking ways to engage in using your perfection for Christ?
5. As a youth leader, name two to five students who you believe are passionate disciples of Christ and list with their name how you might encourage them to follow Christ more intently within their messy community.
6. Are you a passionate disciple of Christ? Is your community?

Tim McCoy is the Executive Minister for the Canadian Baptists of Ontario & Quebec (CBOQ). Previously, he served as the Director of Youth Ministries. Tim and his wife Julie live in Toronto with their three children.

Passionate Discipleship

Six Foundations

Foundation #2

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES



FOUNDATION #2

Passionate Disciples Practice Spiritual Disciplines

The Why

I grew up on a farm, where I witnessed the life cycle of many animals. All animals, from barn cats to cows, have one thing in common: they are born helpless. Left on their own, they would never survive in this hostile world. But with care and training from their mothers and from those of us that worked on the farm, the kittens learned where to get a drink of fresh warm milk and how to catch mice for a meal. The calves learned how to stand, where their meals came from, and eventually how to eat grass and avoid the electric fence! As farmers, we knew how to provide a safe place where animals could grow and learn to become mature and self sufficient.

Yet as youth leaders, we often neglect care for the spiritual lives of the students we work with. We hope they will graduate from our youth ministries as maturing young believers, but we aren't intentional about teaching them how to provide for their own spiritual needs. We usually encourage them to read the Bible and pray regularly, and may introduce a structured Bible memory program, but often it ends there. Perhaps the problem, in many cases, is that our own personal learning has never gone beyond this point! As we look at this topic, I suggest we start by admitting we have a lot to learn, and opening our heart to the wisdom and experience of the Bible and other believers who have been grappling with these issues for centuries.

A common reaction to the phrase 'spiritual disciplines' is one of wariness and scepticism. It sounds like something that might be useful for monks or perhaps a few pious senior pastors, but not for hands-on youth ministry people like us! And discipline certainly never sounds fun!

In *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster (1988) reminds us that "the primary requirement" for practicing the spiritual disciplines "is a longing after God." (Foster, 1988, p. 2) We don't need theological degrees or to spend years meditating in the solitude of a cave. We simply have to love God and desire to know him more than we currently do.

Based on this understanding, we are doing a disservice to our students if we don't deliberately take the time to model and teach them the spiritual disciplines. The goal of this chapter is to introduce some of the spiritual disciplines and suggest some ways they could be introduced in your youth ministry.

The What

Simply put, spiritual disciplines are practices that can help you grow to know God better, and more fully understand his purpose for you. This section will introduce only a few of the many different disciplines. I firmly believe that every Christian should learn about and experiment with all of them. As each of us has a unique personality, we should expect that a few of the disciplines

will become more meaningful to us than others. This does not mean that we should abandon the others, but it may help us decide which will become a more integral part of our spiritual journey. For the purposes of this chapter I will focus on only six of the disciplines, ones that I believe are being seriously neglected in our churches and youth ministries.

Solitude

The youth we work with have more distractions and opportunities than any previous generation. In the midst of ever-present communication and never-ceasing opportunities, it is a true discipline to carve out time to be alone in the presence of God. Each year, I work with a group of very gifted grade 12 students. When I give them an uninterrupted hour to spend alone with God at a weekend retreat, most of them say it is one of the best gifts they have ever received!

In Psalm 46:10, we are directed to “be still and know” that God is God. It is often in solitude, when we are actually listening, that we can hear the still, small voice of God. Our souls, and the souls of our students, need to have quiet times of refreshing. As youth leaders we need to make sure that we practice solitude ourselves, and that we encourage and give opportunity for our students to do the same. During the weekly times we spend with students, we should make it a goal to routinely set aside time for them to be quiet in God’s presence. When we have the privilege of spending extended time with students at retreats or other events, it is imperative that we give them the gift of time to spend with God. The amount of time, and the direction you give them for using the time, will have to be adjusted for the group, but all students will definitely benefit from meeting God in this way.

Fasting

Fasting is the practice of giving something up in order to devote the time, energy or resources to God. This denying of self goes against everything our culture teaches us, yet it is at the core of the gospel. In Scripture, fasting refers to going without food for a set amount of time in order to demonstrate to God our depth of commitment to something, such as seeking forgiveness (Joel 1:14) or seeing God act in a certain way (Esther 4:16).

Often we consider fasting an option, but it should be an act of obedience. Jesus prefaced his teaching on fasting with “When you fast...” (Matthew 6:17) not “if you fast...” As we encourage our students to make fasting part of their discipleship, we need to do so carefully. The Bible contains many warnings about things to avoid when we are fasting: wrong attitudes and actions (Isaiah 58:3-4) and looking for attention (Matthew 6:16-17). A good way to introduce students to fasting is to have a core group or leadership team give up one meal a week in order to pray together. We should also regularly mention fasting in our teaching as a way of more fully knowing God.

Corporate Worship

Many people have a poor understanding of worship. They may think it is confined to singing, and specifically singing in a style that they personally enjoy – something that gives them an emotional buzz! But in the Bible, worship refers to what God's people bring him. People worshipped with singing, dancing, gifts, sacrifices, and through bringing their families and friends with them. We also learn that worship can be misplaced (Luke 4:9-10), and that without the right motives and lifestyle it can be meaningless (Matthew 15:9).

As we work with students, we frequently hear about the problems with worship. The songs are too old, the choir is pathetic, the organ music is reminiscent of a funeral, and most of the people in the congregation seem to be simply enduring the routine of another Sunday! We are presented with a two-fold challenge. First, we need to teach our students that corporate worship is about what we bring to God. Second, we need to be catalysts that push for a real, vibrant and life-changing worship setting. If our students experience worship that is centred on people sacrificially bringing their gifts, their talents, and their families and friends, the type of music or the quality of the singing will no longer be as important.

Meditation

Within the North American church, many people associate meditation with Buddhism, Hinduism, or some sort of strange and mystical experience, so it should be no surprise that we rarely hear the word used within our youth ministries. At the same time, today's youth are often drawn to spiritual experiences that aren't part of mainstream faith communities. This provides us with an open door to introduce them to a discipline that has connected people with God for centuries.

A quick glance at the Bible shows that the word “meditate” is used 16 times (NIV). Of these, 14 are examples of individuals or the worshipping community meditating, and two are direct commands to meditate. Seven of the 16 refer specifically to meditating on Scripture and six speak of meditating on God's attributes (his love, deeds and promises).

By introducing the biblical practice of meditation into the structure of our youth ministry, teaching students how to meditate, and talking about our own experiences, we foster a greater connection between students and their Creator. Meditation doesn't have to be a complicated practice. Ask students to read prayerfully through a verse several times and encourage them to reflect on what stands out. In my experience, I have found that students greatly enjoy this type of exercise.

Study & Memorization

It seems obvious that in order to grow closer to God we ought to spend time studying the Bible and memorizing God's Word, but practice does not always bear this out. Perhaps we value the Bible less than people did a generation or two ago because it is so accessible, available on the internet or PDA in any translation we desire.

God has given us the Bible as a primary way to know him and his desires for us, and as youth

leaders we need to take this very seriously. Here are a few things we can do to build an awareness of, and a love for, the Bible:

- Use an actual Bible, not a printout or digital copy
- Encourage students to bring and use their own Bibles
- Provide Bible reading suggestions for their personal quiet times
- Provide an atmosphere where questions about the Bible are always welcome
- Teach and model the importance of Bible memorization
- Provide regular encouragement to memorize the Bible
- Have a key verse for the month that leaders and students memorize

Simplicity

Living in a country where the prevailing attitude is ‘whoever has the most when they die wins’ – and growing up in churches that often seem to operate on the same philosophy – it is no wonder that living in a simple manner is a foreign concept to our students. Many of them are torn between these two lifestyles. They know more about the global community than any generation before them and recognize the problems of inequality and injustice, yet the desire for material things is strong.

As leaders, we have an incredible opportunity to teach youth about a Christ-centred life of simplicity, but all too often our own lifestyles prevent us from being authentic teachers on this topic. The challenge for us is to be open and transparent with our students, to let them know that we struggle with this issue too and that we, like them, want to make changes. Taking this approach keeps us from hypocrisy and opens the door to real change in our lives and the lives of our students.

Conclusion

The lessons I learned early in life as I worked on our family farm are lessons that have stuck with me. Just like young animals need help to gain independence, we need to prepare our youth to be able to feed themselves from the spiritual richness available to them. The spiritual disciplines are one important piece of this puzzle. If we neglect this crucial task, then we have truly missed out on our primary responsibility.

We're looking for real life examples of this! Please send your stories and photos to:
communications@cbmin.org

Critical Thinking Questions:

1. Which of the spiritual disciplines have been most formative in your own life?
2. Which of the disciplines have you been neglecting in your own life? Do you need to learn more about some of them?
3. Come up with some specific ways that each of these disciplines could be incorporated into your youth ministry.

Recommended Resources:

Willard, D., & Frazee, R. (2005). *Renovation of the Heart: An Interactive Student Edition*. NavPress: Colorado Springs.

Ortberg, J. (2002). *The Life You've Always Wanted*. Zondervan: Grand Rapids.

Foster, R. (1988). *Celebration of Discipline*. Harper: San Francisco.

Dale Stairs serves as Director of the Youth and Family Department of the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches (CABC) and Director of the Youth Ministry program at Acadia Divinity College. He lives near Saint John, New Brunswick with his wife Twila and three sons.

Passionate Discipleship

Six Foundations

Foundation #3

SPIRITUAL COMPANIONS



FOUNDATION #3

Passionate Disciples Need Spiritual Companions

My youth pastor once introduced me to another pastor by saying, “you’ll really appreciate this Ryan guy...he’s always asking questions and trying to understand more about faith in Christ.” For some reason, his comment has always stuck with me. I think it’s because I count this “seeking spirit” as a gift from God and a crucial piece of my discipleship journey. At the heart of my seeking spirit was a desire to be mentored, to have my journey of faith directed by someone who had gone longer and deeper than I.

There is much to be said about mentoring these days, but the point of this chapter is simply to say that if we are going to be passionate disciples, we need spiritual companionship. You can call it what you want, but the most important thing is that you have at least one person in your life who will walk with you in your faith journey, and walk closely enough that s/he can speak into your life with courage, truth and love.

About Spiritual Companions

To understand the concept of spiritual companionship, it may be helpful to differentiate between three different types of spiritual companions: spiritual friends, spiritual mentors and spiritual directors.

Spiritual Friend: This is usually a peer relationship that goes deeper than other relationships. It is an informal relationship but with the deliberate intention to foster spiritual accountability. You may find a spiritual friend at church, at work or at school. This is a friend with whom you can speak openly and honestly and you appreciate and welcome his/her insight and critique of your life and your faith journey.

Spiritual Mentor: This is often an individual who is older than you, someone further along in their faith journey. There may be some formality in this relationship because you may not see this person in the ordinary rhythm of your life. Like a spiritual friend, this is a person to whom you can speak openly and have an appreciation for his/her insight and input into your life.

Spiritual Director: This is the most formal arrangement for a spiritual companion. In some ways, the spiritual director is like a counsellor. You make an appointment with him/her and you may have to pay for this meeting or at least make a donation. Spiritual directors are most commonly found at your local Anglican or Catholic retreat centre or church.

How Do You Get Started?

The process of finding a spiritual companion cannot be rushed. Here are some things to keep in

mind as you move forward.

- Prayerfully seek them out and be open to what God provides (and don't be surprised if they aren't who you expect or think they should be!).
- Don't go to your fans first.
- This time of watching and praying may take weeks, so hang in there!

Guidelines, Structure and Helpful Comments

Here are some helpful insights I have gathered over years of watching mentoring relationships.

You only need one. Relationships take time, so don't take on too many too quickly. If God provides, you may be able to sustain more than one spiritual companion. Realistically, your first spiritual companion will be a spiritual friend. As you grow and mature with this kind of companionship in your life then your spiritual friendships may transition into spiritual mentors or spiritual directors.

If you receive a spiritual companion, you may also be called to be one to someone else. Be open to God's leading on this.

God's got it covered! He's big enough to provide a spiritual companion for you and he's big enough to provide spiritual companions for everyone in your church or faith community. You don't need to be a spiritual companion for everyone, nor should several people be vying for the spiritual companionship of one "famous" person in your midst.

Try to avoid a programmed approach. Spiritual companionship is an organic and grassroots process. I would caution you against setting up a mentorship program in your church that feels like a contrived form of "Christian matchmaking."

Once you have decided on a potential spiritual companion, set a probationary period to see if it will work out. For instance, you may agree to meet three times with no strings attached. At the end of the third meeting either party can opt out without feeling guilty.

Work on some basic guidelines for this companionship so that both people are clear about the expectations for the relationship. Some of the essential components may be as follows:

- We will keep things confidential so we can be open and honest with each other.
- We will speak truth in love. We will not bash each other with truth, but at the same time we will not be too "nice" to speak courageously into each others' lives.

Eugene Peterson (1998) notes that spiritual companionship is not always neat and tidy, and offers the following insights:

I've had a number of men and women who have served me this way over the years – none

carried the title of “spiritual director,” although that is what they have been. Some had never heard of such a term. When I moved to Canada a few years ago and had to leave a long-term relationship of this sort, I looked around for someone whom I could be with in this way. I picked a man whom I knew to be a person of integrity and prayer, with seasoned Christian wisdom in his bones. I anticipated that he would disqualify himself. So I pre-composed my rebuttal: “All I want you to do is two things: show up and shut up. Can you do that? Meet with me every six weeks or so, and just be there – an honest, prayerful presence with no responsibility to be anything other than what you have become in your obedient lifetime.” And it worked. If that is what you mean by “spiritual director,” okay. But I still prefer “friend.” You can see now from my comments that my gut feeling is that the most mature and reliable Christian guidance and understanding comes out of the most immediate and local settings. The ordinary way. We have to break this cultural habit of sending out for an expert every time we feel we need some assistance. Wisdom is not a matter of expertise (Eugene Peterson, 1998, pp. 68-69).

In the context of youth ministry, spiritual companionship creates space for intergenerational ministry. This is a very profound way of getting the generations to interact with each other on a deeper and meaningful level.

For youth workers, I'd suggest that you resist the pull to be a spiritual companion for your students! What I mean by this is that you should start by pulling together a small group of students who want to “go deeper,” and then help these students discern who their spiritual companion is...and that spiritual companion is not you. As you are doing this, it's important to start encouraging adults to pray about their roles in spiritual companionship.

See the **Recommended Resources** section at the end of this chapter for some guidelines and helpful information I have noted from online sources.

Conclusion

Seeking out or being a spiritual companion is not meant to be a burdensome duty for the journey of faith. Instead, it should be an experience that is joyful, challenging and life-giving. Remember that as you begin a relationship with a spiritual companion you are simply on a journey together and the destination is in God's hands.

We're looking for real life examples of this! Please send your stories and photos to:
communications@cbmin.org

Critical Thinking Questions:

1. Do you have a spiritual companion(s)? Think about how you developed these in your life, and then share that story with others.

2. What holds us back from finding spiritual companions?
3. Is it possible to have a church where everyone could say they have some form of spiritual companionship happening in their lives? Why or why not? Dream and pray that this could be a reality in your faith community.

Recommended Resources:

Peterson, E. & Peterson, J. (1999). *Mentoring and Spiritual Friendships*. IVP Books: Downers Grove.

Peterson, E. (1998). *The Wisdom of Each Other*. Zondervan: Grand Rapids.

The Institute for Christian Ministries. *Formation for Spiritual Companions*. Retrieved June 16, 2010, from www.healingministry.org/fsc/fsc_sampler.pdf.

College of Saint Benedict. *One to One Spiritual Direction*. Retrieved June 16, 2010, from <http://www.csbsju.edu/journey/everyone/SpiritualDirection.htm>.

Ryan Sato is the Senior Minister at First Baptist Church in Edmonton. Previously, he served as the Youth Director of the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada (CBWC). Ryan and his wife Sandy live in Edmonton, Alberta with their two children.

Passionate Discipleship

Six Foundations

Foundation #4

“GLOCAL” COMPASSION



FOUNDATION #4

Passionate Disciples are Engaged in *Glocal* Compassion

Writing a chapter about social justice and compassion is a necessary but challenging task for me. It's challenging because it is difficult for youth ministry leaders (myself included) to move from an "entertainment" style of youth ministry to an outward-focused "take-care-of-the-oppressed" approach. For many years our youth groups have been places where we entice and excite students with fun games, activities and programs. To change our approach, we (as youth workers) really need to change ourselves. We need to recognize that social justice is not another program to create but should be part of the fabric of who we are as followers of Jesus. One writer put it this way:

If we are to resist the urge to make justice into another church program, then we must overturn this split between the personal and the social. We must go from preaching 'accept Christ as your personal saviour' to 'you are invited to enter a relationship with God through Christ that changes everything.' We must go from being justified, to being justice-ified. Justice should no longer be something we do, but who we are.²

Humble Beginnings

For justice to be "who we are," we must allow our hearts, minds and souls to be renewed. One of the questions we need to ask is: "Where do we begin?" I'd like to suggest the following ideas:

1) Start with a Posture of Humility

In evangelical circles, one of the mistakes we sometimes make is to think we are ushering in something new that no one has ever thought of before. Oh, the arrogance! If anything, we need to repent of thinking that a Christian approach to justice and compassion is better than others. As you begin, be open to learning from others and be very open to learning from those outside the four walls of your church. Take the posture of a humble learner versus a prideful do-gooder.

2) Pray and Watch – Start Local

² Fitch, David, [Justice-ified by Faith](http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2007/06/justiceified_by.html), available at:
http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2007/06/justiceified_by.html .

Take some time as a group (a month at minimum) to pray for God's leading in the creating of a new thing in your context. As you pray, watch for opportunities that arise via people inside and outside of your group. Pray for wisdom as you try to match needs with the giftings of your group. You may come upon a worthy need but recognize that your group does not have the gifts to meet the need. Frederick Buechner's quote regarding vocation may be a helpful guide:

The vocation for you is the one in which your deep gladness and the world's deep need meet. When you are doing what you are happiest doing, it must also be something that not only makes you happy but that the world needs to have done (Abernethy, 2006, Question / Answer 25).

As you pray and watch and see what needs to be done, make sure you start in your local community. The short-term mission trip has become a popular endeavour for many youth groups, but I urge you to think and serve locally first.

3) Be Faithful

Once you have found meaningful, local ways to be ambassadors of justice and compassion, stay faithful to them. Too often we are tempted to be "one-hit wonders" in the area of service. We serve at the local soup kitchen once a month and wear our service like a badge of honour, but we may never actually get to know and form friendships with the poor. The challenge is for us to be faithful in a place long enough to be the presence of Christ in that place. Shane Claiborne, a social activist who has become an inspiration to many in the evangelical church, puts it this way:

I believe that the great tragedy of the church is not that rich Christians do not care about the poor, but that they do not know the poor. Yet if we are called to live the new community for which Christ was crucified, we cannot remain strangers to one another. Jesus demands that we live in a very different way (Claiborne, 2000, paragraph 4).

Grow with a Global Perspective

Canadian Baptist Ministries (CBM), the mission organization of Canadian Baptists, encourages churches to "Start Local, Go Global" – to make sure their mission has both a local and global perspective. Another word coined more recently to capture this image is "glocal."³ Once you have begun a humble, local and faithful approach to justice and compassion in your youth ministry, I would encourage you to take some steps to make a glocal difference. This might include the following:

1) Understanding How Your Local Choices Make a Global Impact

³ Roberts describes glocal as: "today's seamless integration between the local and global, a comprehensive connectedness produced by travel, business, and communications." (Roberts, 2007, paragraph 2)

North Americans of all ages are waking up to the truth that their consumer choices make a difference in whether people are treated fairly or unjustly in the world. Is it strange that the people of God, who worship a God of justice and mercy, are not leading the way in this movement?

As we seek to raise up passionate disciples, the challenge for us is to help our students make choices that make the world a better place for all. Fortunately, there are plenty of organizations that are making a difference, and there is bound to be a local organization or club in your neighbourhood that is going green, making fair-trade choices or buying local rather than buying from the big box stores.

See the **Recommended Resources** at the end of this chapter to get you started.

2) Making a Trip Outside of Your Country

Once your group has taken some intentional steps to live out justice and compassion in your local context, you may then choose to go somewhere in the world and get a firsthand perspective of the global village. Visit CBM's website at www.cbmin.org or contact the STM department at stm@cbmin.org to see what opportunities may be available for your group. Wherever you go, make sure the trip is more than an opportunity for travel and global shopping. Yes, the trip should have a sense of fun and adventure, but the foundation and purpose of the trip should be justice and compassion. Wouldn't it be incredible if these trips "messed up" our students in such a way that they would think twice before they participated in future global trips that were solely based on vacation and self-indulgence?

As I said at the beginning of this chapter, cultivating this outward-focused mindset is a challenging task for youth workers and youth groups. The way of Jesus was always a way that valued justice and mercy. If we can help our students (and ourselves) become more aware of local and global needs AND if we can actually find meaningful places to be ambassadors of justice and compassion, then we will be giving our students a way of life – one with the potential to stay with them for a lifetime. May God grant us wisdom and courage to do so for the sake of our souls and our world.

We're looking for real life examples of this! Please send your stories and photos to:
communications@cbmin.org

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS:

1. How can your youth group walk the way of humility as they serve their community? What does your group need to repent of (in a life-giving way, not a shame-driven way) before they endeavour to be a blessing in the community?
2. Think of a time when you've been faithful to a ministry. Why is it so hard? Name and be aware of these challenges.

3. Have a discussion with your group regarding this statement: "How can you live simply so that others may simply live?"
4. Who are models of justice and compassion in your sphere of influence? Do we have Canadian Baptist role models? Perhaps your group will be a future role model!
5. As you are asking questions and seeking direction, remember to look for big picture issues of justice and compassion versus getting distracted by superficial issues (e.g. rather than focusing on the issue of abortion in your city or town, take a step back and try to look into the bigger issues that lead to an increasing abortion rate – poverty, loneliness, or injustice). The following quote is insightful:

CHARITY VS. SOCIAL JUSTICE

Archbishop Hélder Câmara made the distinction between charity and justice in a pithy sentence: "When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a Communist."

Systemic injustice is what we are struggling against. Policies of trade and finance are biased in favour of those who have wealth and influence. This works against the poor, the have-nots, the nobodies – the great majority of the world's population.

Charity is based on justice. But charity is often seen as mere alms, and as such is incomplete.

It is therefore necessary to try to improve unjust systems, in addition to donating some of our wealth.

When a destructive system is creating victims in the millions, can we limit ourselves to rescuing them in ones and twos? We must locally do what we can to help work for systemic change, or justice. This is the foundation of charity (Gerwing, 2000).

Recommended Resources:

Abernethy, B. (2006). *Interview: Frederick Buechner*. Retrieved June 16, 2010, from <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week936/interview.html> .

Canadian Baptist Ministries. *Live it Out*. Retrieved June 16, 2010, from <http://www.cbmin.org/cbm/live-it-out1>.

Claiborne, S. (2000). *Downward Mobility in an Upscale World*. Retrieved June 16, 2010, from http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/newmonastics/claiborne_downwardmobility.shtml

Gerwing, A. (2000). *Charity versus Social Justice*. Retrieved June 16, 2010, from <http://www.socialjustice.ws/socialjustice/index.shtml>

McFague, S. (2001). *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril*. Augsburg Fortress: Minneapolis.

Roberts, B. (2007). *We Aren't About Weekends*. Retrieved June 16, 2010, from http://www.christianvisionproject.com/2007/01/we_arent_about_weekends.html

Spurlock, M. (2007). *What Would Jesus Buy* [Motion Picture]. United States: Warrior Poets.

Other websites to consider:

- www.simpleliving.org (consider getting the Claiborne/Campolo DVD called "Simply Enough")
- www.buynothingchristmas.org
- www.tenthousandvillages.ca
- www.justshirts.ca
- www.newdream.org
- www.conversationweek.org
- www.global-mindshift.org
- www.sojourners.com
- www.grist.org

Ryan Sato is the Senior Minister at First Baptist Church in Edmonton. Previously, he served as the Youth Director of the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada (CBWC). Ryan and his wife Sandy live in Edmonton, Alberta with their two children.

Passionate Discipleship

Six Foundations

Foundation #5

CRITICAL THINKING AND CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT



FOUNDATION #5

Passionate Disciples are Critical Thinkers and Culturally Engaged

In 2006, *Time* magazine named YouTube the invention of the year. As I read about the magic of YouTube, three significant things caught my attention. First, YouTube allowed ordinary people to voice their opinion in the midst of a culture dominated by experts. Second, it allowed ordinary people to expose the clay feet of the experts. And third, YouTube cultivated a creative community where members were able to express themselves authentically, and, in some cases, their authenticity made them more famous than the icons of pop culture.

It is with these three ideas in mind that I'd like to talk about the characteristics of critical thinking and cultural creativity as they relate to passionate discipleship. In today's youth ministry culture, we sometimes cultivate Christian disciples who are "bubble believers." Their passion to be creative has been subdued by the prevailing "play it safe" attitude of today's church-going generation.

I would like to raise four questions that speak to this foundation of passionate discipleship.

How can we help our students think practically and theologically?

In my opinion, one of the failures of our education system today is that students come out of school knowing how to regurgitate data without knowing how to problem-solve or think critically. The church is not exonerated in this failure! With children's programs that teach rote memory scripture memorization and bumper stickers that say "God said it, I believe it, that settles it," Christians are too often content to settle for superficial knowledge rather than dig deeper.

In light of this, it is important for us to help our students learn to think for themselves. Our students do not necessarily need more moral lessons on how to be nice in their school halls. They need an intentional approach to spiritual formation that helps them think critically both inside and outside the church.

One example of this is the young earth vs. old earth debate. Our students often find themselves caught between two different views on this issue. At school, they are taught that the earth is four billion years old. At church, if they have a young-earth proponent for a teacher, they are taught that the earth is 7000 years old. So what's a Christian student to do – especially when some evangelical groups tend to make one view seem more "Christian" than the other? We need to help our students think through issues in a thoughtful, balanced and careful manner, without labelling ideas Christian or non-Christian. Many issues need this kind of scrutiny – environmental concerns, fair trade, sexuality and social drinking are at the top of my list.

Helping our students learn to think critically also helps them in everyday life situations as well. No longer do we need to create a "dos and don'ts list" for our students to get along in the world. No

longer will they be won over by the latest commercials, internet schemes or silver-tongued car salespeople. They will be critical thinkers who carefully examine every aspect of their culture...including Christian culture.

My responsibility as a youth pastor is also to help students learn to think theologically. On a practical level this means teaching students how to apply the text of scripture to the text of their lives. When facing big decisions or ethical questions, it is helpful to look at biblical models or examples. As one author puts it, “the challenge of the church is to encourage and empower laypersons to challenge the Goliaths in their working midst.” (Messer, 1989, p. 67)

I must make an effort to remind my students that to be a Christian is to be a theological thinker. Stone and Duke put it this way, “All Christians are theologians. It’s not that they were born that way or decided one day to go into theology. It’s a simple fact of Christian life: their faith makes them theologians, whether they know it or not, and it calls them to become the best theologians they can be.” (Stone & Duke, 1996, p. 1)

As the church moves forward in this post-modern era, non-believers are not looking for cookie-cutter answers to pre-packaged problems. They are looking for people who have a meaningful faith and firm convictions – people who will be able to offer stories of hope and relevance, and yet be grounded in more than just self-help and spiritual band-aids (e.g. “let go and let God” or “you just have to have more faith and everything will get better”).

As a youth minister, I need to be intentional about training leaders who will engage in deeper theological thinking. Though I might be tempted to offer shallow phrases about the Christian faith, I must challenge students to consider the “work of theology,” which is a “matter of personalized, conversational thinking about shared convictions” in the Christian life. (Stone & Duke, 1996, p. 7)

How can we help our students question, doubt and wrestle with their faith?

During my most recent youth ministry position, it was exciting to see what happened when I moved from talking *to* students to talking *with* them. Rather than acting as the Christian expert who was there to tell them what was right and wrong, I tried to be careful to let them express their opinions and doubts about faith. It was less about winning these students for the “truth war” and more about helping them “speak the truth in love.”

One of the issues we talked about was other religious beliefs. In southern Alberta, one of the predominant religions is Mormonism. In my experience, whenever a Sunday School teacher or youth leader wanted to teach about the Mormon religion, they would bring in a video or guest speaker who talked about how they were once in the Mormon religion but then became a part of the evangelical Christian church. This approach didn’t sit well with me, so I decided to ask someone who was an active member of the Mormon Church to speak. I had a good relationship with my Mormon neighbour, so he and some local Mormon missionaries agreed to come to our Sunday School class and one of our youth small groups to talk about their faith.

The result was amazing! Not because either side won a debate or won converts to their religion. It was amazing because we were able to see these Mormon believers as real people and engage

in a healthy dialogue. Both parties were able to talk, ask questions and then reflect on their faith journeys in a context that was safe and gracious.

After these meetings with the Mormons, I set up a visit from a Jehovah's Witness church member and we were able to have another healthy dialogue about our religious beliefs. After every one of these meetings I was so pleased with the honest conversation that continued and how it challenged the students to look deeper into what they believed and the "why" behind their faith journeys.

I believe these are practical ways we can help our students wrestle with their faith. It is so easy for us to "bash the enemy" when it comes to issues like abortion, homosexuality or terrorism. But real life theology is best developed in healthy dialogue where issues and positions have human faces and personalities attached to them.

Helping our students wrestle with their faith is not just a matter of talking about other religions. We need to be intentional about providing a safe place where students can express their doubts and questions. Today's younger generation is no longer willing to accept the answer "because I told you so." They are quick to detect frauds or question double standards. Dialogue, rather than argumentative debate, is the preferred posture. Conversation, not confrontation, wins the day.

How can we help our students become authentic and passionate?

From Peter's bold sermon in Acts 2:14ff where he couldn't help but stand up and talk boldly about his faith, to today's examples of South Americans who courageously stand up for God's justice in the midst of corruption, we have a rich history of what it means to live out faith in a passionate, "turn the world upside-down" manner.

And yet in many North American youth ministries, we've managed to turn our youth groups into "holy huddles" where students are protected and learn cookie-cutter answers to questions that are only asked inside the evangelical Christian bubble. Our Christian bookstores are lined with titles like *Become a Better You* and *The House that Cleans Itself*, and we wonder why our students are happy to settle for the suburban Christian life of ease instead of the messy and mysterious life of following Jesus.

One of the ways we can help students cultivate a life of authenticity and passion is by challenging them to walk by faith and not by fear. Our '80s and '90s North American church culture – with apologetics books like *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* and seeker-sensitive "feel good" evangelicalism – trained us well in making us feel safe. But this comfortable culture has not allowed us to step up and step out in faith. We are meeting our church budgets and we are paying our church staff, but our impact and engagement with the real world around is sometimes minimal.

As we disciple this next generation of believers, our challenge is to unleash an authentic and passionate faith in young people as they follow Christ. This is not a matter of continuing Friday night youth group gatherings and Sunday night bowling marathons. This is a matter of inviting students to a life of passionate discipleship – where lives are transformed by the message of the gospel and the power of the living Christ, where disciples take up their cross and walk with others

through the muck and mire of life, faith, failure and heartache.

It's attempting to live out the Sermon on the Mount. Losing your life and finding it. Being humble and receiving a peek into the Kingdom of God. Giving outrageously, not controlled by possessions or position. Living biblically – not as the authors of *The Year of Living Biblically* did, based on the law of the Old Testament, but by building our lives on the way Jesus taught in the Beatitudes.

Shane Claiborne captures a glimpse of this in his book *The Irresistible Revolution* (2006). Oh that we would stop, pray and reflect on how to live this way in the midst of our youth groups and church communities. Then we might be able to catch a fuller flavour of what it means for God's kingdom to come and for his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Lord, help us!

Henri Nouwen talks about this way of faith without fear:

“Do not be afraid, have no fear,” is the voice we most need to hear....Why is there no reason to fear any longer? Jesus himself answers this question succinctly when he approaches his frightened disciples walking on the lake: “It is I. Do not be afraid” (John 6:21). The house of love is the house of Christ, the place where we can think, speak, and act in the way of God – not in the way of a fear-filled world. From this house the voice of love keeps calling out: “Do not be afraid...come and follow me...see where I live...go out and preach the good news...the Kingdom of God is close at hand...there are many rooms in my Father’s house. Come...take for your heritage the Kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world....Jesus offers us this house right in the midst of our anxious world. (Nouwen, 1990, pp. 21-22)

How can we help our students run towards culture rather than run away from it?

As we live in faith, not fear, we will no longer retreat into the Christian subculture. We will cultivate disciples that engage with the real world rather than expect students to attend Christian school, listen to only Christian music, read Christian novels and go to Christian-owned eating establishments.

With all of the changes and challenges of our culture, this is an exciting but not easy time to be raising up younger disciples in the faith. Gone are the days of the neat and tidy Christian youth group. Students bring a huge range of experiences with them and the demands are diverse, but the adventure is there for the taking. So hold on tight and be prepared for an experience that will turn your squeaky-clean Christian world upside-down.

We're looking for real life examples of this! Please send your stories and photos to:
communications@cbmin.org

Critical Thinking Questions:

1. As you begin this section, take time to listen and reflect on the words to Derek Webb's song "A New Law." You can watch the video on YouTube: (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cr4DBnB7aNQ>). You can find the lyrics at http://www.lyricsmania.com/a_new_law_lyrics_derek_webb.html.
2. How have you helped your students learn to think for themselves rather than simply spoon fed them Christian morality and content?
3. Are your students wrestling with their faith? Does your youth ministry or church environment provide a place for young believers to doubt and ask the hard questions?
4. Who are the students in your youth group who live with the most authenticity and passion? Who are the people in your church who live with the most authenticity and passion? What makes them this way? Perhaps you can have them share their life story at one of your gatherings.
5. When a student graduates from your youth ministry, what do you want them to "look" like – or better yet, "live" like? Try to make your answer less of a checklist and more like a human being.

Recommended Resources

Claiborne, S. (2006) *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an ordinary radical*. Zondervan: Grand Rapids.

Jacobs, A.J. (2008). *The Year of Living Biblically: One man's humble quest to follow the Bible as literally as possible*. Simon & Schuster: New York.

Messer, D. E. (1989). *Contemporary Images in Christian Ministry*, Abingdon Press: Nashville..

Nouwen,H. (1990). *Lifesigns: Intimacy, fecundity, and ecstasy in Christian perspective*, Doubleday: New York.

Stone H.W.& Duke,J.O. (1996). *How to Think Theologically*, Fortress: Minneapolis.

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cr4DBnB7aNQ>)

Ryan Sato is the Senior Minister at First Baptist Church in Edmonton. Previously, he served as the Youth Director of the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada (CBWC). Ryan and his wife Sandy live in Edmonton, AB with their two children.

Passionate Discipleship

Six Foundations

Foundation #6

COMMITMENT TO THE LOCAL CHURCH



FOUNDATION #6

Passionate Disciples are Committed to the Local Church

Many churches in Canada have comprehensive youth ministries starting with the early teen years up until a student graduates from high school. However, there are significant warning signs that reveal these same youth, who have been active members of local church youth groups through their teen years, are not transitioning well after high school. Initial statistics and general observations are pointing to a significant loss of young adults in local churches.

In this chapter we want to suggest that one sign of passionate discipleship is a love and commitment to the local church.

Growing Up on a Conveyor Belt

On Sunday morning, my family has breakfast together, travels to church together, walks across the parking lot together, and then scatters as soon as we enter the church building. My youngest goes to the nursery, my four-year-old goes to the preschool room and my oldest two sons head to another part of the building for their program. My wife and I go to different Sunday school classes, as she teaches a women's class. We finally all meet again at the coat rack, walk back across the parking lot, load into our vehicle and drive home to sit around the same table.

From the moment we are born we probably experience a church program and environment that is designed to our specific needs. This certainly has a lot of merit given what we know about age-specific teaching methods. However, most church members spend the majority of their time in such programs – nursery, children's church, Sunday school, midweek programs, youth groups, mom/dad's groups, seniors' groups – and rarely gather all together. There are few moments of intergenerational connecting. It's like a ministry conveyor belt where people get on and everything is provided.

The challenge for young adults is that for the first time in their lives there is no age-specific program for them. They ask the obvious questions: "Where do I go? Where do I belong?" They have been travelling on the conveyor belt and suddenly they flip off the end.

Rinse and Repeat

One of the challenges of discipleship is to be able to identify how our culture has tainted our view of the gospel. In the West, consumerism has affected our thinking, and consequently our actions. In many ways, youth ministry is dependent upon a consumer-culture framework – from our advertising to our activities to the basic ethos of "show up and we will feed you." Some of the most exciting new methods in youth ministry are ones where youth are required to join the group

as participants or owners in the ministry, not attendees and consumers. We need to keep asking God to rinse us of the impact of our consumer culture.

Again, there is some merit to having an engaging ministry that attracts rather than repels people. However, we need to be careful that we are creating disciples, not consumers – people who long to give of themselves, not only receive. Where does this begin? What does it look like? How do we start?

Community in Messy Time

Creating passionate disciples means being part of a community, and being part of a community is not about having things our way but learning how to surrender to the needs of others. A verse that comes to mind is, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all” (Mk. 9:35 NIV). It is not about getting our way or having things the way we think they ought to be, because it’s not about us.

When I hear people talking about community, I often wonder where they found such a perfect, unselfish group of people with which to practice community. True community is not as romantic as it sounds, and it’s messy. If true community – biblical community – is really happening, it should be messy. We often focus on the stories of people sharing everything and living together (Acts 2:42-47), but forget to address the issues of fake generosity (Acts 5) or appropriately caring for all community members (Acts 6).

Youth should be experiencing community in their youth ministry days, but not only with other youth. Youth ministries must find ways to make meaningful connections with the other members of the church family. This effort to integrate youth into the larger church family will take intentional effort and will mean the youth leaders will have to straddle the youth and adult world to make it happen.

Bashing the Bride

I think another reason why many youth feel disconnected from their local church is the way they hear their youth leaders, parents, or other adults talk about it. If anyone ever spoke poorly or disparagingly about my bride there would be trouble. Yet we so often allow others to speak negatively about the local church. This doesn’t mean we can’t have a conversation about ways we are not fulfilling our calling as a community of Jesus’ followers, but some people just complain about the local church as an institution. Should we be having these conversations? Are we qualified to make judgments about whether a group is really being the church? We need to watch the way we talk about the church and the people in our churches around our youth.

Might we say that a mark of a disciple is that they are falling more in love with the church, regardless of her state, because they are more in love with Christ? Might we say that the deeper we go into discipleship, the greater vision we receive of what the church ought to be and how we might be part of it?

Intergenerational Church

The emphasis on needs-based ministry over the last two decades has changed the lens through which we see those who attend our church. We have learned to see people primarily as members of subgroups, instead of members of the church. This is partly for very practical reasons, but often the result is that people never really feel a part of the greater whole – the local church and the global Church.

Maybe we should be asking: “Do our youth identify primarily with the local church or the youth group?” If it’s with the youth group, what changes can we make so they feel as though they are primarily a member of the church, and secondarily a member of their youth group? As you can imagine, this involves a tremendous amount of conversation that we don’t have time for here, but it requires a change in the entire church culture.

Conclusion

I hope this chapter has challenged you to consider an approach to youth ministry that allows youth to become a more significant part of your local church. While there is still a time and place for youth to meet alone with their youth leaders, this shouldn’t be their only exposure to church. It is critical that youth see themselves as members of the local church first and foremost, and then of the youth group.

We’re looking for real life examples of this! Please send your stories and photos to:
communications@cbmin.org

Critical Thinking Questions:

1. How many adults do your youth come in contact with in a typical week in your youth ministry?
2. How do you think the adults in your church perceive the students? Do they have positive or negative associations?
3. What bothers your youth most about your church? What makes them the most proud?
4. If the youth could change anything in the church, what would they change first? Why?

Rob Nylan serves as Senior Pastor of Main Street Baptist Church in Saint John, NB. He is also an adjunct lecturer at Acadia Divinity College. Rob is married to Jill and they have four children, Nick, Ethan, Annaliese & Seth.

ABOUT CB YOUTH

Canadian Baptist Youth is a collaboration of regional youth directors who are passionate about seeing the youth ministries of the local church embrace grassroots leadership development and global discipleship.

Initiatives around Leadership Development

Canadian Youth Workers Conference – collaboration with other Canadian denominations and youth specialties to provide youth leader training.

Leadership Exchange – exchanging young adult leaders around the country to serve at regional youth events.

Short-Term Mission Experiences – opportunities for young adults from across Canada to travel overseas to be hosted by CBM Field Staff and participate in the mission in that country.

Mutual Mentoring – opportunities for veteran youth workers from across the country to mentor each other as they travel overseas to mentor and be mentored by leaders in that mission context.

Initiatives around Global Discipleship

Curriculum – each region is producing resources to better equip youth leaders or to speak to particular needs in youth ministry. These resources are then shared nationally.

Fundraising – youth are invited to discover the joy of giving and see how their resources can be used to further the work of the Kingdom.

Mission Awareness – CBM website offers up-to-the minute information about Global Field Staff and the projects they are involved in.

Short-Term Mission Experiences – CBM offers significant short-term mission opportunities for local church youth groups to participate in.