

Mentoring Matters

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A student's reflection on new insight gained about ministry, from participation in the Setting Your Sail (SYS) retreat:

*Ministry is the life we have all been called too. It's not confined by the four walls of a building. It's about people... It has no set 'job description' and there are no 'perfect qualities'. No one person will be better at ministry than another. This is insight I received from the SYS retreat. Ministry is a journey and there are some fantastic people going my way.—
Renee*

During the SYS retreat, MQ desires to provide students an emphasis on the importance of the church and the importance of being intentional in ministry. This process assists students when choosing future ministry opportunities.

MQW – Everyone is “called” by God for some kinds of mission. But sometimes the “called” are “called out” for leadership. How you manifest your mission will change throughout the course of your life, but the mission remains constant. When how you do your mission and how you make your way into the world coincide, you are living the dream life. Leonard Sweet, Summoned to Lead.

One of the MQ requirements for students is that they engage in a **short-term ministry assignment (STMA)**. After about 8 months of mentoring, two MQ retreats and 4-5 ministry observations, we think students are ready to test their gifts and passions through ministry. Some students will be working at camps this summer. This is not necessarily a new experience for them, but they will be looking for new leadership opportunities. For others, the STMA will be a mission trip with their church. For these students the challenge will be to find opportunities that stretch them in the areas they wish to explore. Still others will be involved in VBS programs. Most students will be struggling to find their growth and learning edge in their experience. That's where you, as mentor, can make a difference for your student. Please take time to talk with your student about possibilities and opportunities. Perhaps you know of some possibilities available in your community that would be suitable to your student's gifts and passions. Church and youth events are good options, but sometimes students are limited in how much leadership opportunity they are given. Many summer

opportunities are related to caring for children. For students who do not have a passion for working with children some other options should be found. Some suggestions might be:

- to plan worship services for a month
- to volunteer at a nursing home or care facility for a number of days or hours
- to participate on a planning team for an event (eg. concert, VBS)
- to plan several events and perform with a band or drama troupe

The list could go on... The goal of the STMA is to learn more about who God has created you to be and how you can bless others with the gifts you have been given.

MQW– What was your greatest unexpected success this past year? Why was this area so successful? How will this success influence where you go from here?

Recommended reading –

I have come across two books lately that have impressed me with their unique approach to youth ministry. The first is Practicing Discernment with Youth by David F. White. In the first half of the book White makes a case for a counter-cultural approach to youth ministry. In the second half, he lays out a four-part practice for learning discernment based on heart (listening), mind (understanding), soul (remembering and dreaming) and strength (acting). You will find an excerpt from this book below.

The second book, Awakening Youth Discipleship by Brian J. Mahan, Michael Warren and David F. White addresses similar issues. Wipfandstock.com gives the following description:

Youth ministry has increasingly lost touch with its origins in the way of Jesus and the social practices intrinsic to Christian discipleship, and has instead substituted layers of "Jesus talk," middle class values, fun and games, and doses of "warm fellow-feeling." Awakening Youth Discipleship articulates the history of this domestication of youth and ministry. Mahan, Warren and White tell a story of the ways in which our society has colluded to shape a domesticated adolescence. The authors believe a Christian response to this challenge must be multilevel, addressing the problem at three levels – society, church, and individual. The authors propose reclaiming practices of discernment that both engage congregations in social awareness and involve individuals in discernment fuller vocational opportunities than those allowed by popular cultural norms.

Excerpt from Practicing Discernment with Youth

High schools are not the only institution to abstract youth from concrete experiences and understandings of their communities. The commercial youth culture industry contributes to this abstraction by connecting youth to "youth culture," rather than to local communities, homes, churches, and neighborhoods. With the recession of adult influence and local authority from adolescent lives, the entertainment media now

form most of our youth's sensibilities, obscuring the religious significance of issues like consumption, sexual objectification, or violence. It is difficult to overstate the extent to which media manipulates the desires and distorts the relationships of youth. As expressed by Bob Pittman, the founder of MTV, "We don't shoot for the 14-year-olds, we own them."

This colonization affects young people in ways that inhibit youth ministry. Not only have contemporary adolescents become largely inured or numb to a buzzing mass of media images, but this electronic environment also diminishes their ability to think critically and imaginatively about the world. The problem carries over quickly into the youth ministry setting. If television programmers have given up, as they have, on complex plots because they know that youth with remote controls are likely to change the channel in the absence of an immediately gratifying or stimulating program that includes sex or violence, then youth ministers might also recognize young people's similar aversion to complexity at church. Media consumption promotes the value of things over people, superficiality over depth, objectification over otherness, utility over relationship, individualism over interrelationship, sensation over understanding, and passivity over activity. These conditions in turn make it increasingly difficult for youth ministers to engage young people's intellects as a means of loving God and neighbor...

While youth seem outwardly comfortable with such distortions of human life, they risk never finding authentic selfhood or Christian vocation described by Jesus as love of God, neighbor and self. Youth who cannot engage their faith in critical relations to culture risk either abandoning their faith entirely or splitting it off as a separate aspect of their middle-class (or otherwise status quo) life. Such a separated faith does not threaten youth or youth culture; indeed, it remains so domesticated as to hardly distinguish their lives from persons outside the church. Is this really the kind of faith we want our youth to cultivate? Despite a current anti-intellectual trend in American Christianity, the marks of a Christian disciple surely should include understanding the world in which we live and the God who moves us to respond to this world. To fully embody love of God and neighbor, youth need skills for investigating the structure of contemporary life and the causes of human distortion, including their own exploitation by the entertainment and fashion industries, together with the conditions that push youth of developing countries into sweatshops to produce American fashion products.

My point here is not to demonize popular culture in wholesale fashion. It is simply to suggest that youth ministry cannot afford simply to baptize popular culture by packaging Christian content in fashionable styles. Popular culture does more than sneak some bad language in through the back door. It forms the norms, values, beliefs, and habits of our youth, not just through its content but also through its form: sensationalism, individualism, and rampant consumption. These cultural forms cannot embody Christian virtues of patience and self-control, nor can they teach us the practices of contemplation and seeking justice...

Critical skills alone, however, remain insufficient to spark the imaginations of young people for participation in God's reign. If Christians faith is to resist rather than affirm a future of individualism and consumption, young people need to be confronted with the logic of their faith in ways that inspire, new, joyful, and just models of reality, models that include young people's participation with God in the reconciliation of the world.

- from Practicing Discernment with Youth by David F. White, The Pilgrim's Press, 2005 pp. 51-54.