Local Church Philosophy of Youth Ministry

**"Equip church Youth Leaders to evangelize and disciple the world's youth
through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, guided by the Word of God,
in the power of the Holy Spirit." (GCYM mission statement)**

The mission statement of Great Commission Youth Ministry is based upon three passages of Scripture: Matthew 22:37-39, Matthew 28:18-20 and Ephesians 4:11-13. It is our Commander and Chief Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ who directs us to go into the world, preach the Gospel, and make disciples of all nations. Further, the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, stated that it is the responsibility of the local church to train laymen and empower them for the work of the ministry. The mission statement below summarizes the Biblical mandate for the local church youth ministry.

The goal is to develop **culturally appropriate** programs,
through which every **young person,**
will **hear the Gospel**, and
have the opportunity to **spiritually mature.**

What does it mean to be culturally appropriate?
(Identify the culture; use the culture, to reach the culture)

One of the greatest tragedies of today's youth ministry is that we violate basic cross-cultural principles as it relates to youth culture. This occurs because adults often feel uncomfortable around this group possibly because they had a negative personal experience when in their youth. Such discomfort is typically misconstrued for spiritual conflict when it is basically a cultural reaction to normal adolescent behavior. Each person carries within him no less than three (3) "cultural imprints".

1. *Personal* cultural imprint. This is the result of one's genetic heritage and family influence. Geographical location and family tradition come together to formulate one's world view and self image. The period of time and political makeup of one's world both contribute to the personal cultural imprint. How one dresses, enunciates words, embraces certain values, and deems those values as appropriate all combine to formulate a sociological "bent" and personal cultural imprint.

2. *Church* cultural imprint. This is the result of the dynamic of contributing factors such as denominational distinctive, ecclestical core values, and socio-economic status. "This is the way our church does certain things" is often a summary of one's church culture.

3. *Community* cultural imprint. Socio-economic, geo-political, and sociological norms all contribute to the defining of the over-arching community where one finds himself living and embracing a collective conscience.

Dress, musical preference, acceptable code of behavior, and appropriate interpersonal relationships are the cultural expressions and definitions of a person and a group of people. It is the position of GCYM that "we are to become all things to all men" without violating Biblical standards and offending the indwelling Holy Spirit.

It is not the goal of our organization to "Westernize the young" but to evangelize youth to the Glory of Christ. Culture is the vehicle through which the "Word became flesh and dwelt among us." It is the

articulated strategy of our organization to *"identify the culture, in order to use the culture, that we might reach the culture."*

Youth ministry, by its nature must be culturally sensitive to understanding the young. The Gospel can change a person. The regenerated person can change the world as God directs. Only when popular culture obviously violates scripture or Biblical principles should we confront culture. Jesus did not pray to His Father to "take us out of the world" but "to keep us from evil". We are to use every available means, at every available time, to win and disciple every available person.

Who are young people?

(They are a distinct "people group")

Since we are to reach and disciple young people we must be able to identify our target group. In many cultures youth can be categorized into four areas:
1). *Early Adolescence,* ten to thirteen years of age,
2). *Middle Adolescence*, fourteen to seventeen years of age,
3). *Late Adolescence*, eighteen to twenty-four years of age,
4). Emerging Young Adults, 25-29

Many cultures define the young by that period beginning at puberty (when one is first capable of reproduction) and ending at marriage. Today, many sociologists agree that young people have become a "distinct people group" that have capabilities of connecting even across language barriers. They have their own uniform language, code of conduct, and group identity that globally identify them as a peculiar people group. Such grouping is reinforced by school systems structures. Legal systems regulate their conduct and influence their identity.

International organizations categorize youth for the purpose of disease control, educational concerns, and political "human rights" issues. The adolescent phenomena, though new to human history, has emerged as an international reality and established its own identity of the one-world global community. Global demographics and statisticians enable us to locate this "target group." It is the mission of Great Commission Youth Ministry to take the Gospel to them. The world is young and getting younger.

Statistics tell us that nine (9) of ten (10) people respond to the Gospel before their nineteenth birthday. The world is young and today's most fertile mission field. We must locate them and give them the message of Salvation while they are receptive to God's Good News!

What is a fair hearing of the Gospel?

It is the message of the Gospel, "the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ" that is able to deliver each young person from an eternity away from God. It is the truth that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." The message of the Gospel must be presented to each adolescent in such a way that a "fair hearing" is the result. The student must decide to repent of sin and receive the "free gift of salvation" by confessing Christ as Lord and Savior.

The strategy of GCYM is to expose the young to the Soul Saving Gospel at an early age so that they may have the opportunity to experience eternal life.

What does it mean to be " Spiritually Mature"?

Since the objective of our ministry is to facilitate spiritual maturity, we must have a quantitative measure for determining the attainment of such a lofty goal. Would we recognize a spiritually mature person if we met one? For the sake of argument, there are at least five (5) descriptors of spiritual maturity:

1. **Converted**. Can the young person give evidence that he has experienced the new life in Christ? This can be measured by a written testimony documenting his salvation experience. This may also be determined by an oral response to an inquiry: "Explain to me how you know that you are assured of going to heaven when you die." The beginning of spiritual maturity is the "new birth" experience.

2. **Churched**. Has the young person followed the Lord in believer's baptism? Is there faithful attendance in the house of God? Is there use of spiritual gift(s) in Christian service? Is there sharing of financial resources for the Lord's work? Is there an attitude of respect and reverence for the institution and its leaders? Affirmative answers to these questions indicate that the youth is displaying a characteristic of spiritual maturity. The youth needs to realize that they need the church and that the church needs them.

3. **Craving the Word**. Spiritually mature people read and obey the Word of God. They can often be found meditating on it, discussing and studying it, and recording their personal findings in their life's journal. Receptivity to the preaching of scriptures and attendance at Bible study opportunities evidence a personal growth in grace.

4. **Compassion for the Lost**. It is normal for a mature Christian to be spiritually concerned for the eternal destiny of others. This is a measurable trait that can be revealed in one's prayer life and the discipline of praying specifically for the unsaved. Compassion is also demonstrated by the intentional presentation of the Gospel to others. Accommodating another's schedule in order to place that person under the hearing of the Gospel indicates spiritual maturity.

5. **Consecration**. When teens come to a place of surrender, they can enthusiastically declare that Christ is Lord and that "I will do *whatever* the Lord asks of me, *whenever* He asks it, *wherever* He would require it". The Lordship of Christ knows no limits to the expectations of the Savior. Such consecration may be observed in everyday behavior with regard to simple chores and reactions to parental requests. It translates to life's decisions and interpersonal relationships. Consecrated young people are willing to terminate social relationships when it is obvious that the Lord so requires. Nothing is more important than the pleasure of the Lord to the mature Christian. Nothing comes between the youth and their relationship with Jesus.

What is the five-fold strategy for programming a successful Youth Ministry?

There are fifty-two (52) weeks in a year. How one spends time with young people reflects one's philosophy of ministry. A way to assess one's philosophy is to record all the youth specific activities conducted in the last year. The following descriptors may be used to determine the purpose of such a list. Often, planing a youth calendar is a spontaneous and reactionary occurrence. A successful program does not just happen, it is intentional and purposeful. Those responsible for the youth program often fall into the trap of scheduling activities that they personally enjoy, rather than what is best for the "purpose driven youth ministry".

Ask yourself, "what is the greatest need of our young people?" and then plan in advance to meet that need by scheduling weekly events that will assist in accomplishing goals. Remember: **You get what you honor.** If you honor talent over character you will get talent only. If you honor political placement of teens over character, you will get suedo-Christian politicians. If you honor busyness over intentional Biblical based ministry you will get shallow busy teens. Analyze your past calendar of events using the following guide. Prayerfully reprioritize next year's calendar according to a purpose driven ministry. The end result will be a Christ honoring and successful youth ministry.

Level One, Relationship Building (Pre-Evangelism).

Those who attend this function will make a commitment to "come and involve themselves in the activity". The young are naturally drawn to an environment where there is a nurturing and warm atmosphere. The key to successful programming is to provide ample opportunities for interpersonal interactions. A Biblical youth

ministry activity must always facilitate such an environment. It is appropriate to have an activity where the primary purpose is to "build relationships". An example of an activity may be to take students where they "hang out" such as amusement parks, athletic events, and other locations where culture dictates that this is "the place" where the young want to attend. Finding a "culturally neutral" place where the saved and unsaved can comfortably coexist is most ideal for a "level one activity". This level is also incorporated in individual contacts with non-Christian youth.

Level Two, Evangelistic Outreach. (Sharing the Gospel)

Those who attend this function commit to "come and listen to the evangelistic presentation". The successful youth program will provide activities that focus on attracting the unsaved. The event/activity should be planned so that up to 50% of those who attend are non-Christ followers. This could be the same as a level one event but this time the Gospel is shared. Where do the crowds of young people congregate? Use this "natural cultural dynamic" for the location of an outreach event. Be careful that you do not compromise Scripture or cultural norms in order to attract the crowd. At the same time, successful youth ministry masters the art of "identifying the culture, to use the culture, to reach the culture. Become "all things to all men in order to reach some". Personal evangelism is also utilized at this level of programing.

Level Three, Bible Study & Discipleship. (Coaching and Mentoring)

Those who attend this function make a commitment to "come and study". Little opportunity is provided for fellowship or any secondary activity. Preparation for this level of programming is to provide students with the tools for a serious study of the Bible: Bibles, commentaries, concordances, and other similar Bible study aids. The primary focus of this level of programming is a serious examination of the Scripture. Weekly Bible memorization, book studies, experiential learning, and other various methods involving incentives and highly motivational programs are used at this level.

Level Four, Ministry Training & Equipping for Ministry (Develop by Doing)

Those who attend this function make a "contractual agreement to a code of conduct that commits to exemplary modeling". Any time that a young person is placed in front of peers as an example mandates that this young person is "exhibit A" for a Christian teen. Such items for consideration would be faithfully attending church, tithing, observing church leadership standards, and generally demonstrating Christian character at home, at school, at work and in every facet of life. Programs include any ministry training and equipping that places this young person in front of students doing the work of the ministry: i.e. special music, mission trips, ministry teams, youth council, etc.

Level Five, Leadership Reproduction. (Modeling, Let them Lead)

Those who attend this function "have a supervisory role over other young people". The commitment of the participant is to fulfill the job description of the assigned leadership responsibility. This is the highest recognition for student responsibility and probably has the minority of student involvement. We don't give students the role of leadership to "keep them out of trouble" but to recognize and reward their servant's hearts and leadership skills. They are placed in leadership because they have earned it and everyone realizes it. We develop programs that provide such opportunities for service.

Great Commission Youth Ministry seeks to equip those called to work with the young. This equipping is Biblically based, success oriented, and non-traditional. The local church is the primary focus of ministry lead by component leaders who know and love young people. In addition to local church based ministries, GCYM partners with training institutions that provide undergraduate and graduate level instruction in order to raise up a generation of leaders to labor in the most fertile mission field, the field of the world's young.

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