

What is a . . . ?



Great Commission Youth Ministry

By Dr. Randy Smith

Before I answer that question, as it relates to my new Youth Ministry consulting ministry, Great Commission Youth Ministry, bear with me as I share a bit of history for context. I have been in youth and student ministry for more than 50 years! I have been a youth pastor at 3 churches since 1970. I started with a church of 120 people (25 youth) and helped grow that church to over 600 over 12 years (with 200 youth, middle school through college age). Then I went to a church of 10,000 and served as a high school student pastor to more than 500 students for 9 years. Finally, I went to a church of over 8,000 as overall student ministry pastor (middle school through college age) to more than 1000 students for 10 years! It was during this last student ministry pastorate that I began my International Youth Ministry leadership training ministry: Youth Ministry International (YMI). After retiring from YMI in January 2023, I started Great Commission Youth Ministry (GCYM) in April of 2023 as a youth ministry leadership training consulting ministry for both U.S. and international training, including consulting for both informal and formal academic training efforts and programs. As president/founder of YMI I helped start more than 35 international youth ministry formal training programs in 16 countries, from certificate to master's degree level. Most of those programs continue to this day. The YMI led "Training the Trainers" strategy equipped indigenous youth leaders to train their own local church youth leaders. What a blessed journey! To this day I still interact with many of the more than 2500 graduates of those academic training programs. As of this writing, some of the fruit has been to see more than 65 of these graduates go on to teach youth ministry formal classes in their own context! Also, there have been at least 7 youth ministry books written by these graduates! What a joy!

When my wife's health and other circumstances beyond my control led me to retire from YMI in 2023, I felt led by God to keep doing youth ministry training in some new ways. After all, you can retire from a position and a specific ministry, but not from your calling. My calling was and is to equip youth ministers to reach the world of youth (ages 10-29), both here in the U.S. and around the world as God gives me health and time. As I prayed and organized this new ministry, God began to direct me toward a new and unique emphasis on youth ministry training; to be specific, a **Great Commission** emphasis. It was like a cymbal-crash moment! OF COURSE, I remember thinking, it's all about the Great Commission, but there was more. Not only did our Lord command that we reach and disciple the world, and for me this meant the youth of the world (Matthew 28: 19-20) and lead them to spiritual maturity (Ephesians 4: 11-13), but there was also the GREAT COMMANDMENT: Love the Lord our God with all of our Heart, Mind, Soul, and Strength, and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-39)! I was challenged to re-think my church youth ministry training strategy to combine these three directives: Great Commission (evangelism/missions outreach), Spiritual

Maturity (local church discipleship/ministry), and the Great Commandment (intentional worship & loving your neighbor as yourself)! Thus = **Great Commission Youth Ministry**.

I began to develop my new mission statement and ministry definitions, and the results are:

Mission Statement for GCYM –

“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.”

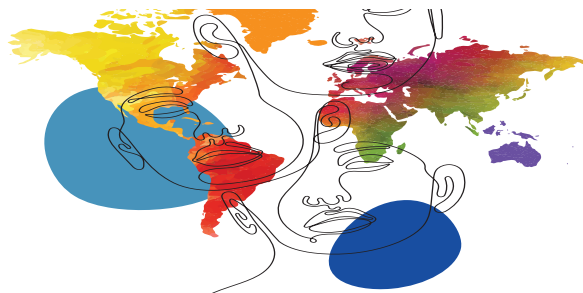
Definition of a Great Commission Youth Ministry –

“A Great Commission Youth Ministry is one that within all of its Strategies and Programs balances The Great Commission and the Great Commandment!”

(Matt. 22:37-39, 28:19-20, Eph. 4:11-13).

That is where I am today and will likely be for the rest of my youth ministry life! But there is more to this than a local church Great Commission Youth Ministry, I believe we also need a Great Commission **Youth MOVEMENT!**

What is a . . . ?



Great Commission Youth Movement

Definition: “A movement of Youth, all over the world, partnering with God to reach the youth generation for Christ in the 21st Century!”

I am writing a new book about young people who God used to minister alongside Him in his work as described in his Word, from Genesis to Revelation. At the moment of this writing, my research has revealed at least 37 (and still counting) young people who God acknowledged in His Word who were used to do his ministry on earth, -- including the majority of the original 12 apostles! It is an amazing study! And, as I thought about a Great Commission **Youth Movement**, while doing the research for the book, I began to conclude that the Great Commission has really ALWAYS been a Youth Movement! Interested? Read the book when it is finished: **“The Great Commission Youth Movement: Youth who God used in scripture to launch the Great Commission.”** What we need is a revival of that Youth Movement in this century. I have always said, “If the Great Commission is to be fulfilled in the 21st century, it must by-and-large become a Youth Movement.” I think that now I should add that the Great Commission should become a Youth Movement **AGAIN!** But I want to get back to the question – What is a Great Commission Youth Ministry in the local church? What should such a church youth ministry look like based upon the definition: *“A Great Commission Youth Ministry is one that balances The Great Commission and the Great Commandment within all its Strategies and Programming”?* What would it take to transform any existing local church youth ministry into a **Great Commission Youth Ministry**? The **KEY** is the word **BALANCE!** Allow me to explain.

Back in the late 1990’s I read a book that would change my ministry direction forever. The book was entitled “Run With the Vision” by authors Bob Sjogren (co-founder of Frontiers Mission agency) and Bill & Amy Stearns (Global Missions Mobilizers). Then I read “Unveiled At Last,” another book by Sjogren that explores the theme of the Great Commission throughout scripture from Genesis to

Revelation. Before reading these books, I was an *American Youth Leader* who “happened” to be a Christian who believed in the Great Commission. AFTER reading the book, I became a Global Great Commission Christian Youth Leader who “happened to be” an American Youth Leader. Wow, what a difference the order of a phrase makes. Yes, there is a big difference in being a Global or “World” Christian as Bob Sjogren puts it, rather than an American who happens to be a Christian. For example before I read the book, if you would have asked me the question: Who’s responsibility is it to reach America for Christ, I would have said – “American Christians.” After reading the book, my answer is that the responsibility to reach America for Christ belongs to “All Christians in the World.” In fact, as I write this article there are missionaries from all over the world coming to America to help reach our country for Christ! As Sjogren explains in his books, a “World Christian” is one who in their daily lives balances the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. Sjogren explains how we as believers, churches, and “Youth Groups” can be involved in the Great Commission through at least 5 means:

1. Be a **“Prayer Aware”** – Knowing about the activity and needs of modern missions globally, such as the awareness of the unreached people groups of the world, the persecuted church, etc.,
2. Be a **“Goer”** – Get involved in long-term, mid-term, or short-term mission trips, see the mission fields,
3. 3. Be a **“Sender”** – Support those who go and work in the mission fields with prayer, training, encouragement, finances, etc.,
4. 4. Be a **“Welcomer”** – get involved in ministry to those from around the world who live in your own community, international college students, refugees, migrants, etc.,
5. 5. Be a **“Mobilizer”** – be involved in recruiting others to join the Great Commissions effort by going, financing, sending, and helping Christians to be properly informed and prayer-aware, and teaching about the importance of the Great Commission from the scriptures.

It is vitally important that we teach our youth how to be a “World” Christian youth who is engaged in the Great Commission while living out the Great Commandment. Consider some of the following ideas:

1. Get them involved in effective short-term mission trips.
2. Train them how to reach the “World at their Door” like International students, foreign exchange students, and refugees in their schools and neighborhoods. An organization called: International Students Inc. (ISI, www.internationalstudents.org), has a book entitled “World at Your Door” that teaches churches how to reach international students through the church. At my last church, I used the ISI training material to start in international student ministry that is still functioning to this day. In that ministry we connected international students with “Friendship Families” from our church who then hosted the students by inviting them into their homes monthly and taking them to church. Many came to Christ as a result. Several “Foreign Exchange” high school students attended our church and came to receive Christ while in the U.S. The Great Commission is not just a short term trip or a mission conference or tacking missionary prayer cards on our church bulletin boards.
3. Organize an ongoing youth missions service committee and feature weekly or monthly mission testimonies at youth group meetings.
4. Organize a “pen-pal” letter writing program for our Christian teens to write other youth around the world who need to be encouraged or even as a means of sharing the gospel. The names and addresses of these “foreign” teens can be gleaned through short term mission trips.
5. Your youth can even support those of the persecuted church who are in prison (www.helpthepersecuted.com) by writing them and getting to know their names and circumstances.
6. Have your youth group “ADOPT” an unreached people group every year, and ask them to download the unreached people group app to pray for a different unreached people group everyday (www.joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app).

7. Challenge parents of teens in your church to pray about taking in a foreign exchange student for one year, as a means of reaching and discipling youth from around the world (<https://www.ayusa.org/families/what-is-hosting>).
8. When missionaries come to your church, ask the missions pastor if the missionaries can stay in the homes of some of your teens.

Our teens need to understand that they do not have to live and serve in a foreign country to be engaged in the Great Commission. They can be engaged at home every day! There is a lot of emphasis today in youth ministry regarding “worship” using worship and praise music and festivals. We even encourage our students to “lift up their hands” in praise and worship. That is all GOOD, but if their hands do not “COME DOWN” and get engaged in evangelism, discipleship, and missions, then what is the point of worship? TRUE worship will of necessity involve MISSIONS or it is not true worship! I heard a Christian leader say that without Worship there would be no missions. Sorry, but I don’t believe that is Biblical.. the truth is that without Missions, there would be no Worship. God has been pursuing the lost world through Gospel missions from the moment Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden! God did not give the Great Commission to Christians and the church, rather, God is giving us as Christ followers and the church **TO** the Great Commission. The Great Commission (a term never used in scripture) has been a Biblical concept since Genesis chapter 2, Genesis 12, and throughout the entire Old and New Testaments. It is US who try to separate Worship and Missions within the church and our own lives. For example, when it comes to “Worship” we love to quote “partial” verses of scripture such as Psalm 45:10; “Be still and know that I am God” but we forget the other half of the verse that says, “I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” Or there is the famous “worship” phrase from Psalms 67:1 which says, “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us..” but we forget the second verse (vs. 2) that says “**THAT**, your ways may be known on earth, your SALVATION, among ALL NATIONS.” You see, you can’t have Worship (Great Commandment) without the Great Commission. Isaiah must have been shocked when God gave him his assignment and calling as a prophet to Israel when he said in Isaiah 49:6 “It is TOO SMALL a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel (from captivity) I have kept. **I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.**” And it was **NO** coincident that Paul quoted Isaiah 49:6 in Acts 13:47 as he launched his mission to the Gentile world! Paul was a balanced “Great Commission” Christian servant, minister, and missionary!

Do the youth of our churches realize that of the 17,466 distinct people groups in the world, there are 7,391 (42.4%) of them that have from 0 to 2% evangelical Christians living in their midst? Do the youth of our churches realize that of the 7,106 living languages in the world, that as of 2020, only 704 have the complete Bible translated?. Only 1,551 of those 7,106 known languages have the New Testament translated. (www.wycliffe.net) Do the youth in our churches look at themselves as American youth who happen to be Christians, or do they realize the truth that they are Great Commission Christian youth who just “happen” to live in America? There is a huge difference! Do they have a Christian worldview that balances the Great Commission with the Great Commandment that includes the Great Commission; to reach and disciple the entire world, as an integral part of Christian spiritual maturity (Ephesians 4:11-13)? It is up to us as pastors and youth leaders to teach this proper balance to our youth and challenge them to become part of a Great Commission Movement of highly consecrated youth who want to reach the entire world for Christ! It can be done!

I started this article with a bit of history about me, but I would like to close it with some history about youth themselves. I had never been on a mission trip until I was a young youth pastor at my first church in the mid 1970’s. I was invited to go to Peru, South America to help a mission team from Liberty University minister for two weeks at a youth camp in Lima, Peru. There were two weeks of youth camp, where Roscoe Brewer and the “Light” singers ministered to about 500 youth for two weeks. The Light team sang and worked as camp staff and Roscoe preached each night while other pastors preached during the morning. Toward the end of the first week, I was asked if I wanted to preach a gospel message using an interpreter during the evening chapel. I was a bit intimidated by my lack of Spanish and knowledge of

the Peruvian youth culture, but I agreed to preach. After a simple Gospel message, an invitation to come to the front of the chapel to become Christians was given. Several youth walked to the front where missionaries and national leaders met the youth, knelt down at an altar bench, and led many to salvation in Christ. I was humbled and filled with joy. But it was what happened the next day that changed my youth ministry forever. After the evening service, I was introduced to one teenage boy who had accepted Christ during the service when I preached. I was excited to meet him and was even more excited when I discovered that he was bilingual, he spoke English! That was wonderful, because my one-year high school Spanish class only taught me enough Spanish to be dangerous! As I talked to the young man, an idea came to me. I asked him if he thought there were many more young teenage boys attending the camp who were not Christ followers... he said Yes. So I made him an offer. I asked if he would be willing to take me around the camp the next day and introduce me to some of the non-Christian boys in the camp. I told him that he could be my translator and after an introduction, I would share the gospel and he would share his testimony of becoming a Christian. He nervously agreed, and the next day, the last day of that camp week, he and I as a team led several teenage boys to Christ in the boy's dorm during camp free time. Wow.... with a little help and training and encouragement, a brand new Christian teen became an evangelist...literally over night! That experience set my mind to dreaming about how other youth and youth leaders could, when properly motivated and trained, win their generation to Christ! I came back to my church youth group in Ohio, determined to train the youth under my care to become not just American Christian youth, but to become global Great Commission Youth, both at home in their schools and communities, and throughout Ohio, the U.S. and around the world!

I began training teenage singing teams, puppet teams, drama teams, mime teams, karate teams, gymnastic teams, illusion teams, BMX bikes and skateboard teams, multi-media teams, weightlifting teams, and any other teams with committed youth who wanted to dedicate their skills and talents to winning souls to Christ, both at home and abroad. Over the next 40 years or so I took thousands of consecrated and determined teenagers with me to minister in juvenile detention centers and public middle and high schools in Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, California, Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, Marilyn, West Virginia, Florida, Texas, Arkansas, Georgia, New Mexico, Arizona, Maine, New Hampshire, and Hawaii (18 states). I took teens to the steps of the U.S. Capitol and to the White House park in Washington D.C. I took thousands of youth to minister in youth camps, public schools and juvenile prisons in Venezuela, Mexico, Canada, Brazil, Kenya, Tanzania, Romania, England, Spain, Cuba, Slovakia, Ukraine, and even communist China (13 countries) where these teenagers then shared their faith, and personally led thousands of youth and adults to Christ. It was my joy to watch these beautiful teens become successful Great Commission Teenagers and be used of God in the same way youth in the Bible, like Daniel, Shadrack, Meshack, Abednego, Joseph, Esther, Isaac, Joshua, Caleb, Josiah, Jerimiah, Mary, Mark, Timothy, the disciples of Jesus and many other unnamed teens were used by God in the scriptures to do the work of global missions! I saw first-hand what a dedicated young person could do for the cause of global missions, if given the proper respect, motivation, training, and resources! This is the army of global youth that needs to be recruited by the Holy Spirit and unleashed upon a young world where more than 2.5 Billion youth between the ages of 10-29 still do not follow Christ. This is all in a world where 5 Billion of its 8 Billion are under the age of 30, and where more than 50% of these non-believing youth live in only 2 countries, China, and India. In China and India, less than 2% of the 3 Billion people who live in these two countries alone are Christians. Who will reach them with the gospel? American missionaries? No, the work must be done by the local youth themselves! **They Can Do Anything with God's help and with the help of well-equipped youth leaders in local churches all over the world.... a youth movement!** I witnessed the power of committed young people firsthand and have NEVER gotten over it, and never will! From the youth groups of only 3 churches, I saw literally tens of thousands of souls won to Christ by committed teenagers. This could be multiplied by thousands of youth groups in hundreds of countries around the world... a movement!

Allow me to conclude with a challenge to all local church pastors, elders, and teen parents who want to see a revival and surge in the ministry to its youth in the church. In order to succeed in producing

a Great Commission Youth Ministry, there must exist a “Youth Friendly Church.” The pastors and elders and parents of teens are the “gate-keepers” of youth ministry progress in the church. Unless these three church leadership entities permit, create, and proactively perpetrate a Youth Friendly Church atmosphere, there will be no progress. By a “Youth Friendly Church” I mean:

- A church that allows the youth ministry the freedom to become culturally appropriate in its youth ministry programs and strategies (without compromising Biblical parameters),
- A church that not only permits, but intentionally and proactively uses youth in significant church ministries and equips them to do so,
- A church that provides adequate space and financial budgeting to accomplish the youth program goals,
- A church that provides ongoing training for youth leaders so that they can keep up with appropriate cultural and theological training needed to minister to the youth.

You can have the best trained youth leaders, and motivated teens and parents, but unless the “gate-keepers” of the church grant the permission and provide the resources the movement will not happen, hard but true statement. The following mission statement, or something similar should be adopted as the directive for its youth ministry:

“The goal is to develop the culturally appropriate programs through which every young person will hear the Gospel and have the opportunity to Spiritually Mature.”

[Matt. 22:37-39, 28:18-20, Eph. 4:11-13]

As church pastors and youth leaders, may we all pray and work toward our youth becoming balanced Great Commission Christian youth who strive for spiritual maturity and consistent worship while at the same time working to reach their friends at home and the lost around the world with the Gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Let’s reevaluate our strategies and programs in the light of being Great Commission Christians and join the Great Commission Youth Movement! Amen.. May it be So!

Dr. Randy Smith
President/Founder
Great Commission Youth Ministry
www.gcymtraining.com

