

IT'S TIME FOR A REVOLUTION IN YOUTH MINISTRY

A case for wholesale change in the way youth ministry is practiced today, and point the way to a radically different path-one that reclaims the power of the gospel in kids' lives.

Do you have a treasured dream for your youth ministry? Every kid in the group is passionately in love with Jesus Christ. Before, they were as spiritually shallow and morally compromised as many of their peers. But now they're living a different kind of life, energized by their relationship with God in ways even their parents have never experienced. And it's not just about their own changed lives; they're changing the world they live in. They've reconciled with their parents and have learned to honor them. Their influence breaks down relational walls and crumbles cliques. As their influence grows---slowly, subtly, their friends throwaway their bottles, needles, pills, and condoms. At school, the students, staff, and teachers not only notice the change but also are drawn to discover what's fueled it. Kids begin flocking to the church in record numbers, and youth group is overflowing. Soon, whole cities and regions begin to feel the fire as this spiritual and moral resurgence quickly expands and extends beyond the kids who started it into homes and churches, workplaces, and marketplaces. Soon, even nations are transformed by the revolution.

to dream the impossible

Sadly, this vision seems well out of reach right now. We all know that's not where our kids are. And this situation isn't likely to change if our current trajectory stays the same. Not with all the tools and techniques in the world. Not with the best training or technology. We've tried rallies and seminars. We've tried live events and satellite linkups. We've tried campaigns and curriculums. And in spite of all our efforts, our young people are getting worse, not better.

We're at a crossroads, where a fundamental change is required within an entire youth culture. That's why we need far more than new methods or materials. We need more than a retooling. In a survey of more than 25,000 ministers, youth workers, and parents, 98% said we need nothing short of a spiritual revolution- a wholesale change that's radically different than our current paradigm for ministry. And that's exactly what we're calling for among our youth!

The time has come for a revolution.

1. We need a spiritual revolution because there's little transformation in the moral behavior of kids who call themselves Christians- the majority is no different than non-Christians. Today, incredible as it sounds, "accepting Christ" can make little or no difference in a young person's attitudes or behavior. A recent study of more than 12,000 senior highers found that kids who say their religious beliefs are "essential" to them differ only slightly, and often not at all, from the moral behavior of all teenagers.

Among teenagers who say their religion is "very important" to them, over the last 12 months: 74% said they cheated during a school test; 83% percent lied to a teacher; 93% lied to a parent; and 63% said they became

physically violent toward someone when angered. Overall, there was no more than a 4% difference between the behavior of those who said they took their faith seriously and those who said faith was unimportant to them. Our kids are not exhibiting the kind of transformed life the Bible promises (2 Corinthians 5: 17). In fact, many of them don't even believe that a transformed life through Christ is necessary. Our kids need to be challenged to heed the words of Jesus, who said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24-25). We must develop a "cross culture" among our youth- a culture of young people who commit to the Christ of the cross, set aside their selfish ambitions, and shoulder their own cross for the sake of the gospel. We need a transformed generation empowered by the Spirit of God to live Christlike lives.

2. We need a spiritual revolution because the majority of our kids have a distorted view of truth, leading to a host of destructive life choices. Lying, cheating, and violent behavior has become the norm among our own teenagers. But even more alarming, most kids actually consider their wrong choices "right choices."

The majority of our kids are doing things that blatantly violate biblical standards. But when asked if they were satisfied with their own ethics and character, 91% of highly religious kids said "yes." Their wrong choices are acceptable to them because 83% of Christian teenagers claim that "all truth is relative to the individual and his or her circumstances." To them, truth isn't something to be discovered in the person of Christ or the pages of God's Word- it's something to be created within as their own subjective truth.

We desperately need revolutionaries who will boldly proclaim the message that Jesus Christ is the embodiment of absolute truth, and his Word is an accurate revelation of himself and his ways. We need youth ministries that correct kids' distorted views of truth and employ "God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do".

3. We need a spiritual revolution because the secular world has distorted our kids' perception of reality. Today's kids comprise perhaps the most pragmatic generation ever. They want what is real, relevant, and "right now." The problem is, with no moral absolutes to guide them, they're convinced that what's true and relevant is whatever works right now. Almost 72% believe that "you can tell if something is morally or ethically right for you by whether or not it works in your life." We want our kids to adopt a worldview that believes that God's ways protect us from harm and provide safety and blessing for us-but that's not what many of our kids believe. Instead, they've bought into a secular worldview that customizes reality to fit "what works right now." Tragically, this hodgepodge approach to life can lead to self-destruction. We need a revolution among our young people that will transform their secular worldview into a Christian worldview, and their self-destructive activities into Christlike attitudes and behavior.

4. We need a spiritual revolution because many of our kids are leaving the church, never to return. People often say "the youth of today will be the church of tomorrow." That's no longer the case. Virtually every denomination reports the same trend: The majority of their young people are leaving the church and never coming back. Historically, between 55% & 66% of church young people have said the church would play a part in their lives when they leave home; today only 33% of church youth say the same!

the shape of a revolution

Simply stirring up those who are concerned about our youth can't generate a spiritual revolution. God himself must be the initiator of the revolution in the hearts of concerned Christians, but we must do our part. We must face the challenge squarely. The revolution must incorporate four key components.

1. We must build bridges between churches and parents. Youth ministry is vital to a young person's spiritual and moral development, but the greatest influence in the lives of teenagers is still parents. Out of 14 sources of influence, 78% of teens name their parents as having the most impact on their thoughts and deeds. Parental influence over young people is 3-7 times more impactful than cultural influences. Parents influence their kids more than teenage peers, the Bible, teachers, and the church. In a poll of more than 25,000 parents and ministry leaders, 88% thought the current moral and spiritual decline among youth was more of a parental and adult problem than a youth problem. This calls for a revolutionary approach of integrating youth ministry and family ministry—one that involves parents in the process.' A youth worker's fundamental task must be to serve the whole family—equipping parents as well as their kids to embrace and live out true Christianity.

2. We must build bridges between churches and youth groups. It has been observed that the major revivals in church history have most often begun with young people. Yet in many of our churches today, youth ministry is viewed as an afterthought or run like a baby-sitting service. If we do not find a way to build a bridge between youth and the church, we have little hope of a sustained spiritual revolution among our youth.

3. We must build bridges between relevance and substance. Personal relationships are the key factor in getting kids to a youth group event- they're 3 times more influential than any other attraction. Relationships bring the kids to attend a youth group, but they will not return unless the church delivers the goods. What are they looking for? Substance. Learning practical and credible insights about God was listed twice as often as . . . fellowship, the games, the music, the casual and friendly atmosphere." Kids want and need relevant, substantive truth experienced through authentic relationships. We need revolutionaries willing to combine "sizzle" and "substance." We need youth ministries that challenge kids not just to mouth a prayer, but to pick up their crosses. We need a revolution that will provide kids with solid Catholic truth and help them to see how it is intensely relevant to their everyday lives and relationships.

4. We must be living models of passionate Christianity. It will be nearly impossible to lead our young people to a transforming encounter with God without first experiencing such a transforming encounter ourselves. Those of us in ministry to youth must be a living model of this spiritual revolution in order to incite such a revolution. This challenges each of us to "try and live in such a way that no one will be hindered from finding the Lord by the way we act and so no one can find fault with our ministry" (2 Corinthians 6:3).

We have never sensed a greater challenge or opportunity than that which we face today. We envision a core army of youth workers, pastors, parents, children's workers, small group leaders, Catholic educators, and Catholic leaders primed & ready for revolution. Imagine a revolutionary army of young people experiencing such a transformational encounter with the one true God that they live as "children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which they shine like stars of the universe" (Philippians 2:15). Imagine a committed army of youth workers, trained, equipped, and empowered by the Spirit of God to incite such a spiritual revolution. Imagine yourself and your youth group being among that number. Christ's call is clear. The need is real. The time is now. .