

Missional Youth Ministry: Moving from Gathering Teenagers to Scattering Disciples (Youth Specialties (Paperback))

Brian Kirk, Jacob Thorne



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The mainline church in the past few decades has witnessed a ghettoization of youth within the church, segregating them off to a particular room, perhaps in the basement, where they engage in ministry in isolation from the rest of the congregation. They are assigned a "youth minister" or "youth director," often the staff person with the least experience, freeing up the "real" ministers to serve the adults in the church. They seldom serve on church boards or governing bodies in anything other than a cursory manner. Their leadership in worship is limited to one special Sunday a year; their activities seen more as programming than ministry, and their place often described as "the church of the future" rather than the body of Christ in the here-and-now.

For decades, youth ministry in mainline churches has been program-driven, assuming that the primary function of youth ministry was to use activities and events to attract young people to church and keep them occupied until they were ready to be adult members in the faith. In recent years, it has become increasingly obvious that this paradigm has failed to develop youth as life-long participants in the Christian church and in the Christian faith. The result of such a model of ministry is that youth come to see church only as those segregated activities reserved for teenagers, most of which bear little resemblance to the practices of the rest of church life. Consequently, when youth graduate from high school and youth group, they perceive that their most meaningful church experiences are ended. Mainline congregations are now seeing the evidence of the real lack of impact of their youth ministries as the population of young adults in churches continues to shrink – even those young adults who were once regular participants in church youth group programs.

In short, the program-driven model of youth ministry has failed to help youth find their place within the mission of the Church. Rethinking Youth Ministry critiques this older paradigm and invites the reader into a dialogue to help rethink many of the deepest assumptions of youth ministry in the mainline church. We challenge the consumerist goal of judging a youth ministry's success by the number of its participants. We push back against the notion that a youth ministry is the sum total of the events on the calendar. We rethink the place of volunteers and parents, calling for a greater role of adults as spiritual mentors in the lives of church youth. We send out a call for greater understanding of modern methods of teaching and the impact of brain research on the intellectual and spiritual development of youth and we re-imagine a new role for mission within youth ministry which calls youth to see mission not as isolated activities but as the very heart of their faith journey. Rethinking Youth Ministry serves as a theological companion and practical guide for all those "working in the trenches" of youth ministry who are seeking to offer students a deeper, more consequential, and active life-long relationship with God through the ministry of Jesus Christ.

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