

Beginnings of a Philosophy of Youth Ministry

**Project 96 Ministries
Of
Rock Creek Bible Church
Meriden, KS**

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Project 96 Ministries of Rock Creek Bible Church Mission Statement

Project 96 Ministries exists to help bring children and teenagers into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. We strongly feel that parents are a vital part of this decision making and want to help equip and resource parents to disciple their children. Our main goal is to partner with parents to help the kids to find their identities in Christ, so they understand who Jesus is and what He did for them on a personal and intimate level.

What does Project 96 mean?

Statistics show that if the current trends of the teenagers and of youth ministry continue, only 4% of teenagers will be Bible believing Christians. So the 96 is obviously the remaining percentage that we want to show them that Christ is the Way. Right now the “generation in charge” of the country is 31% Bible believing Christians. If that number gets to 4%, what will the world look like?

Definitions

Church: The church can be described as the body of believers at Rock Creek or the believers in the US or even across the world. But in this document, the church is referring to the leadership of Rock Creek Bible Church, i.e. Pastor, Youth Pastor, Sunday School Teachers, Sponsors, Elders, Deacons, etc.

Youth Group: The youth group of RCBC is not separate from the church as a whole. The church as in the body of believers at RCBC includes the youth group. The teenagers in the Project 96 Ministries are just as much part of the church as the people who go to the Adult Sunday School Class

What do we do about this?

Is the way we are doing youth ministry working? Not only at Rock Creek Bible Church, but in the church as a whole. Are we missing something? Are we missing opportunities to share the Gospel with some kids? We are at a pivotal moment in ministry, as teens in general are desperately searching for something spiritual. They find all things claiming to be spiritual on television and movies, over the radio, and in magazines. But how many are beginning their “spiritual journey” at church or youth group? The old model of youth ministry isn’t as effective anymore because it was about fun events and devotions that were light and fluffy. They didn’t address the serious and big questions that kids have. “What happens after you die?” “Can all religions be right?” “Wasn’t Jesus just a man?” “Who says Christianity is right?” “Give me concrete evidence that there is a God!” These are questions that teens are asking and they are looking for answers. Who is going to answer first, the church or the world?

Seeing kids at Jeff West and other places, you see that there are few leaders and many followers. Teens like to be accepted and will follow certain people and do what they are doing to be accepted. Do they feel accepted at church? Do they feel accepted at home? Those are the two

key questions we need to address. Do we as a church accept kids who have black hair and white makeup? Does the church teach parents to teach their kids to be accepting? Do we as a church teach parents to accept their own kids? If we answer yes to 2 out of the 3, (66%) is that enough? Kids all over the United States are struggling with issues and have big questions, but they aren't getting answered by the church. They come to youth group in high school, but after graduation they don't step into a church again. Or even worse, after they get a driver's license or start dating, they leave the church.

Why is that happening? What are the reasons behind this? Did it just start lately? To answer these questions I turn to a book by Steve Wright. Wright has been in student ministry for over 20 years and has seen this problem developing for years. He has a solution, to rethink youth ministry. His book is appropriately titled *Rethink*. Depending on whose numbers you use, 58% - 84% of teens who graduate from church youth groups do not return to church, according to Mark Matlock.¹ Is that acceptable? According to George Barna in *Real Teens* Only 33% of church teens say that church will play a part in their lives when they leave home.² Statistics are never completely accurate, so let's say that it is 18% instead of 33% of church teens say church won't play a part in their lives when they leave home. Is even that number acceptable? You may say that you would rather take 1 in 5 leaving over 1 in 3. Is that how we should look at things? What does Jesus tell us in Luke 15, the parable of the lost sheep?

Luke 15:4-6

⁴ "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.'

That is a sobering thought, do we go after those who are on the fringe as a shepherd would after his sheep? Why don't we? The church has invested a lot into youth from the time they are born. We build nurseries, have Sunday School classes, children's church, VBS, camps, Jr. High group, Sr. High group, retreats, lock-ins, paid staff, and countless volunteers. What is it that we are doing wrong? The return on our investment isn't as good as we would like it to be. If the church was a business, we would have gone bankrupt long ago.

George Barna did a study of teenagers. 70% were active in church youth group and 82% identified themselves as Christians. Here is what they said:

- 63% believe Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, Jews, and all other people pray to the same god, even though they use different names for their god.
- 87% of our kids believe Jesus was a real person who came to earth, and 78% believe He was born of a virgin, yet nearly half (46%) believe He committed sins and over half (51%) say He died but did not rise from the dead.
- 58% believe that all religious faiths teach equally valid truth.³

Josh McDowell says this in response to these statistics,

¹ Mark Matlock, "From Wacky to Wise," *Youth Worker Journal*, May/June 2006

² George Barna, *Real Teens* (Regal Books, 2001), p.136.

³ As reported in *Beyond Belief to Convictions* by Josh McDowell, p.9.

“It’s not that they haven’t embraced a version of Christianity; it’s simply that the version they believe in is not built on the true foundation of what biblical Christianity is all about.”⁴

Why are these statistics like this? What is the problem?

Youth ministry in many cases has become a teen amusement park where they can check in and then check out. After they experience years of fun and games, all you can eat, no responsibility, and free from parents, they have, with our help, trained their appetites for pleasure to find more alluring fulfillment in the adult world. A study of high school seniors done by Fuller Seminary’s Center for Youth and Family Ministry shows that what teens wanted to see more in youth ministry was #1 – desire for more service projects, #2 – deeper conversations, #3 – missions trips, #4 – accountability, #5 – worship, and last was more games.⁵ The Barna group did a similar project and at the top of the list was “to better understand what I believe.”⁶

Why did these youth desire to do more service projects? Why did they want deep conversation instead of fun and games? Why do 2 out of 3 or even 3 out of 4 teens graduate from God after high school? How can we keep this from happening? Why did parachurch organizations think that it was a sin to bore a kid? It started when the church wanted to keep the teens from being a nuisance so they kept them distracted with pizza parties, camps, games, events until they were mature enough to join the congregation. But what they didn’t know was that they would leave before joining. These pizza parties and crowd breakers don’t address the issues the teens are struggling with. So how do we at RCBC change the Project 96 Ministries to break the mold of the old model of youth ministry?

There is a delicate balance we need to be careful of when we start changing ministries. A lot of people don’t address this balance, but it is vital. There are many fringe kids in youth groups. Kids who feel like outcasts at home, school, and at church. Then there are kids who are extremely mature in their faith for their age. How do we change the model of ministry to fit both extremes? Some models just focus on the fringe kids and have a free fun for all with a little devotional at the end. Other models focus on the mature kids and give a lot of “meat” to the kids. In reality both models are non-biblical. There is no evidence in the Bible for the church to provide a spiritual drop off center for teenagers. It is even clearer about the church not being the primary discipler of teens. The Bible makes it clear that is the parents’ job and responsibility.

So how do we balance these two groups of teenagers? What is the solution? Lets look at some more research to figure out the best solution. In a study of 272,400 teenagers conducted by USA Today Weekend Magazine, they found that 70% of teens identified their parents as the most important influence in their lives. 21% said their friends and 8% named the media.⁷ Teens whose parents disciple and talk about religion to them on a regular basis will be twice as likely to “keep their faith” after high school. Three out of four parents think their teen’s friends have more

⁴ Ibid., p.15.

⁵ Lillian Kwon, “Study: State of High School Seniors Today,” Posted on www.christianpost.com, October 24, 2006.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Wayne Rice and David Veerman, *Understanding Your Teenager*, (Lakeside, CA: Understanding Your Teenager Books) p. 118.

influence than they themselves do. But studies show that teens put their parents above their friends and peers. In fact half of teens mention at least one of their parents as their hero. The opinions and influence of parents are valuable to the church, to the youth ministry, and to the students. I think we underestimate the power of parents. Not only does the church do this, but parents themselves do! If we can partner with parents, I think we can take our Project 96 Ministries to the next level. Parents have more influence over their kids than the church does, than their friends do, and more than the media does. The problem lies within the paradox of the current ministry structure. Parents feel that the church should be discipling their teens. The church has taken that responsibility and we now need to give it back.

Mark DeVries of Youth Builders says the following:

*Effective youth ministry in the 21st century is about bringing parents back into the picture. No longer can the church act as the main dispenser of spiritual formation. We need to see ourselves as resources for parents in their roles as spiritual formation builders. It's not the job of the church to be the only force behind students' spiritual formation. It is, and always had been, the role of parents.*⁸

So what the church needs to do is train parents to train. Josh McDowell in his book *The Last Christian Generation* tells us:

*Parents ... carry more weight-for good or bad-than they give themselves credit for. How a child thinks and acts is still molded to his or her home life, which means the crumbling foundations of the faith among this generation is as much of a parental problem as a church problem, if not more so. If we're going to reclaim the next generation, then the home and church must join forces together like never before.*⁹

The original form of discipleship for teens is the family. This was established in Genesis and made into the law in Deuteronomy (the Shema in Deut. 6:4-9). Are parents discipling their children? Is the church doing their job in providing the parents the tools and methods to disciple their kids. A lot of parents think it is the church's job to disciple their kids, which is why we have youth groups. Some parents think it is the sole responsibility of themselves only and the church shouldn't interfere. There needs to be a balance. To use the terms of Steve Wright in his book, we need to co-champion the church and parents.

We can't champion the church as primary discipler of the teenagers. We also can't champion the home. We have to co-champion. Meaning that the church helps in the discipling process of children and teenagers by offering resources to the parents. Some people and churches think there is not basis in the Bible for age-graded classes, i.e. Sunday School, Bible studies, youth group, etc. If that is true, then why has there been age graded teachings in Hebrew history? Rabbis would teach in the synagogues in Talmud and Mishnah schooling. It wasn't called youth group, Sunday School, or teen Bible study, but it was separated by age, just like it is done today.

If the church and home work together as one, it may look like this:

Acts 2:42-47 (ESV);

⁸ Mark DeVries, "The Role of Parents in Kids' Spiritual Formation," *Youth Worker Journal*, March/April 2003, p.22.

⁹ Josh McDowell, *The Last Christian Generation* (Holiday, FL: Green Keys Books, 2006) p. 60.

⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

There is a relationship between the home and the church in this passage, going to temple, and breaking bread in the homes. They worked together, and the results were miraculous. The home is responsible for training children, but the church is responsible for equipping parents in how to train their children. Youth programs should be church related and family centered.

Implementation

How do we do this at Rock Creek Bible Church? What will the Project 96 Ministries do to achieve this Biblically mandated form of ministry? Steve Wright says,

*"The goal of the current student ministry model had been to keep kids 'good,' out of jail, out of the back seat and out of toxic relationships. However, it's not enough to simply help students get through the pitfalls of high school, although that is part of the assignment. The Bible clearly states our goal is to build disciples of Christ."*¹⁰

Step #1

First we begin with Prayer. This doesn't mean that the Youth Pastor prays for these things, but the church leadership does. What do we pray about? The teens of Jefferson County.

Here are some statistics of teens across the United States.

- Nationally, nearly one million teen girls become pregnant each year. That means close to 2,800 teens get pregnant each day.¹¹
- Every 78 seconds a teen attempts suicide – every 90 seconds one succeeds.¹²
- The largest group of viewers of internet porn is teens between ages 12 and 17.¹³
- Nearly 4 in 10 pregnancies (Excluding those ending in miscarriages) are terminated in abortion. There were about 274,000 abortions among teens in 1996.¹⁴
- Of today's young people: One out of two will live in a single parent family at some point in childhood. One in three is born to unmarried parents. One in four lives with only one parent today. One in eight is born to a teenage mother. One in 25 lives with neither parent.¹⁵

¹⁰ Steve Wright, *Rethink* (Wake Forest, NC: InQuest Publishing, 2007) p.109

¹¹ "Facts in Brief: Teen Sex and Pregnancy" (New York, The Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1996).

¹² National Center For Health Statistics, Taken from www.cdc.gov/nchs/.

¹³ Family Safe Media, December 15, 2005, taken from www.children-online.org/frames/research.html.

¹⁴ Information taken from www.childbirthsolutions.com/articles/pregnancy/teensex/index.php.

¹⁵ The State of America's Children, 1998 Yearbook, Children's Defense Fund

Is that enough to make you cry for the teens of today? Look at Nehemiah chapter 1, he obviously hurt for Israel. It says in verse 4, “As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.” John Piper in his book Brothers, We Are Not Professionals, says the following:

“Examine yourself: Does it lie within your power right now to weep over the spiritual destruction of the people on your street? Such tears come only through a profound work of God. If we want this work of God in our lives and in our churches, there will be agonizing prayer: ‘God, break my heart!’ I choose the word “agonize” carefully.”¹⁶

We need to pray that God will break our hearts for the teens of this county. We need to pray for the kids who live in the statistics above. We have them in our church and they are at Jeff West. We come to God and weep because we know we have nothing to offer. It is only going to be by a work of God that we can change our ministry and help the teens of this county. We can't change families without prayer. We must bathe the ministry with prayer.

Step #2

Set up a main goal for the ministry.

The main goal that we have for Project 96 Ministries is that by the time teens go through the whole program, they will understand who Jesus is to them. This means that they will not be living merely through what I have told them about who Jesus is or who their parents have told them He is. The teens need to have their own beliefs that are based on the Biblical foundational truths. A lot of teenagers graduate from ministry programs and don't have their own view of who Jesus is. They just remember what other people told them who He is. When they are challenged at college or work, they don't know what to say. They don't have any core foundational beliefs. Jesus is the Messiah, the one who saves. What does that mean to you? How do you know He is the Messiah? If we only offer an apologetics course on how to defend your faith, they can memorize the answers, but they may not know why they are the answers. They need to experience who Jesus is to them. Not according to me, not according to their parents, and not according to the pastor. But to them. When they get to college or the work force, they will be able to defend their faith, because they have discovered it, God has built it in them, and they know who Jesus is and who He always will be to them.

Step #3

The next step is to assess what we have.

Current areas of Biblically based youth ministry:

1. Jr. High Sunday School - We use an internet based curriculum called Grapple that has weekly questions (called clues) posted where the kids can use the Bible to discover the answers during the week. Parents are encouraged to help with this. We hand out a weekly parent grapple guide that gives parents information to help the students continue learning about the lesson throughout the week.
2. Family service projects - Parents can serve and be an example to the kids. We are working directly with the Deacons and Elders to make this a regular facet of our ministry.

¹⁶ John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals* (Nashville, Broadman & Holman, 2002) pp.56-57.

3. 4 year family devotional – We are in the process of publishing one that the youth will do twice as they go through our youth ministry. They will start the second semester of their 6th grade year and end after the first semester of their Sophomore year in college. This devotional is designed to have the family read through the Bible together at least once as their child goes through the youth ministry. We are also using this to guide us through the Sr. High Bible study. As the teenager enters High School, they will have an opportunity to go through an inductive study of the whole Bible in their four years of High School.

Plans on the drawing board:

1. Parent/Child retreats and campouts. Father/Son, Father/Daughter, Mother/Son, Mother/Daughter.
2. Family Mission Trips

Step #4

Parents in leadership roles. I think that parents can be a valuable asset to youth ministry. We can have a rotating volunteer crew for different retreats and events. One area that I can't wait to implement is a Parent Leadership Team (PLT). This team would consist of 4-6 handpicked parents of teens in the youth groups from various schooling backgrounds. The purpose of the PLT is to provide direction for the ministry. Parents know what their kids are facing on a daily basis and they know the pressures they have at school. The PLT will provide invaluable direction and insight to the Project 96 Ministries. *PLT Job Description attached to back.*

Step #5

The next objective is to see what the Project 96 Ministries and RCBC can offer to the parents. Can we offer them resources to help them on their journey of raising children and teenagers? I would like to see us offer parent training meetings every other month that will address issues of discipleship and other cultural influences that may hinder bringing up children and teens in a godly way. This meeting would be organized by the PLT and Project 96 Ministries, but would use resources from the church leadership and other "seasoned" parents. The main goal of these meetings would be to provide a solid Biblically based resource that parents could use to help them as they disciple their teenagers.

I also realize that parents can learn from each other. We would implement a monthly D-Group for parents. This discipleship group would involve a PLT member facilitating a discussion that will help parents bounce ideas of each other. Parents can strengthen and help each other. Parents of seniors can help parents of freshman because they have been through the early high school years.

Step #6

Implement new programs (listed below)

Questions

Question #1

What about teens whose only connection to church is youth group?

There will always be some kids who come because their friends brought them, their friend led them to Christ and their parents don't want anything to do with church, etc.

Options:

We should always strive to include the parents by way of sending them the newsletters and trying to talk to them outside of the church.

We can utilize surrogate parents for these kids. Plug them into a family that is striving to be what God wants them to be.

We can also use the more mature teens in the youth groups to help disciple them as well. We need to be teaching parents to be willing to let their kids be disciplers. Some fringe teens may only have a connection with another teenager in the youth group, we can utilize that for God's glory.

Question #2

What about the families on the fringe? (These are families with little to no involvement in church outside of simply attending Sunday service)

How can we encourage them to get more involved in the church and youth ministry?

Options:

I think it is more profitable for a PLT member or another parent to talk with them than the youth pastor himself.

Question #3

Why isn't my child getting enough "meat" at youth group?

This is a common question and critique, but the answer is Biblically based.

Options:

With this Biblical approach to ministry, co-championing the church and parents, the meat givers are the parents. The church is not designed to be the exclusive discipler, that is the parents' job. The church is to provide resources for the parents and a ministry to the teens. Our overall goal and objective is to present Biblical truths that nourish all the teens, from the seeking outsider to the new Christian to the long time believer. Project 96 Ministries is not designed to give "meat" but to resource and train parents, and echo their teachings to their teens.

If a parent thinks their teen is too mature for youth group, I would share with them the goal that we have for all those who graduate from our Project 96 Ministries (Step #2 above). If they feel that their kids have reached that goal, then I will ask them to ask their teen this question and offer no help:

At the dinner table, pass out blank pieces of paper and give your kids 15 minutes to answer this one question: "Why do you believe that Jesus is the Messiah?" If they use a verse or prophecy, they must cite it.

This is the same question Jesus asked His disciples, so we should be teaching that to the teens, parents should be teaching that to their kids. This also is the same question that every teen will be faced with someday in their lives when trials come their way, when the university science professor talks about evolution, when they work with an atheist, etc. To truly know Jesus is to know why He is the Messiah. Answering this question properly will assure our ministry and the church that this particular teenager is ready to face the world on their own with a mature and developed faith.

Question #4

How do we address the big questions? (What happens after we die? Was Jesus really God? Etc.)

In order to address the big questions that teens are looking for answers of, we must first help the parents answer those same questions for themselves so they can teach it to their kids.

Options:

We can equip the parents on how they might teach the Word of God at home, lead their children to Christ, and use everyday problems and issues to point their children to God. If a teenager asks their parents if Jesus really was God, the church should equip parents to be able to answer that in a way that a teenager can understand. We as a church and as a youth ministry desire to see the teens ask the tough questions and are delighted to answer them, but we take even more pleasure in providing parents the knowledge and resources to answer those questions for them.

When the home and the church work hand in hand, we can build a youth ministry that is Biblically based and will put parents back as the primary disciplers of their children. The church isn't a drop off or spiritual daycare for children and teens. It is a body that has been established by God to ultimately glorify Himself, which includes helping parents raise their families in a God-honoring way. If we can take advantage of this system, we will be able to have a youth ministry that stretches far beyond the walls of Rock Creek Bible Church.

Programs

What will the Project 96 Ministries offer to the teens and parents with this new look at ministry? We will offer the same basic ministries, with a few new twists.

The bulk of the ministry will be on Wednesday evenings with the following two ministries:

6:15 – 7:45 on Wednesday

Project 96 Youth Group

This group will consist of the teens in 7th grade through those in 10th grade. We will meet on Wednesday evenings during the Pioneer Clubs time. The purpose behind this ministry is to provide a safe, fun, intriguing environment for those who are in Jr. High and the first half of Sr. High. Our goal is to teach Biblical truths through many different avenues, whether it be a music video, a song, a video series, or a book of the Bible. The atmosphere will be relaxed, yet structured enough to keep the attention of the teens. We have combined Jr. and Sr. High to an extent. We have found that Sunday evenings are not a good evening for all High Schoolers to meet. Wednesday is a better night for most, but most older High School kids do not have a desire to meet with Jr. Highers. The younger High School students don't mind this idea. As stated above (step #2), the main goal of this ministry is to help kids find their identities in Christ.

8:00 – 9:00 on Wednesday

Project 96 Bible Study

The Bible Study is intended for Sr. Highers, but is open to Jr. Highers who will not distract the teaching of the Word. We plan to go through the entire Bible in four years, starting in Genesis in January of 2010 and ending in Revelation in December of 2013. Then the study will repeat.

Project 96 Commissioners

This special group is for the Juniors and Seniors, those who are at the tail end of High School and are at the stage in life to decide where to go and what to do. We will teach and disciple them at various locations around the county and Topeka. We will utilize different locations to stress different teachings. We will schedule these meetings in accordance with the teens schedules. The goal of this ministry is to prepare the teens to fulfill the great commission found in *Matthew 28:18-20*: ¹⁸ *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Project 96 D-Groups

These groups are not for the kids but for the parents. Parents will get together with 3 other sets of parents once a month and discuss methods of discipleship and issues their kids are facing. The discussion will be facilitated by a PLT member.

Project 96 Parents Meeting

We will meet every other month to train and give resources to parents to help them disciple their children and teens. Discussions will be led by Elders, Deacons, PLT members, Youth Pastor, and outside sources.