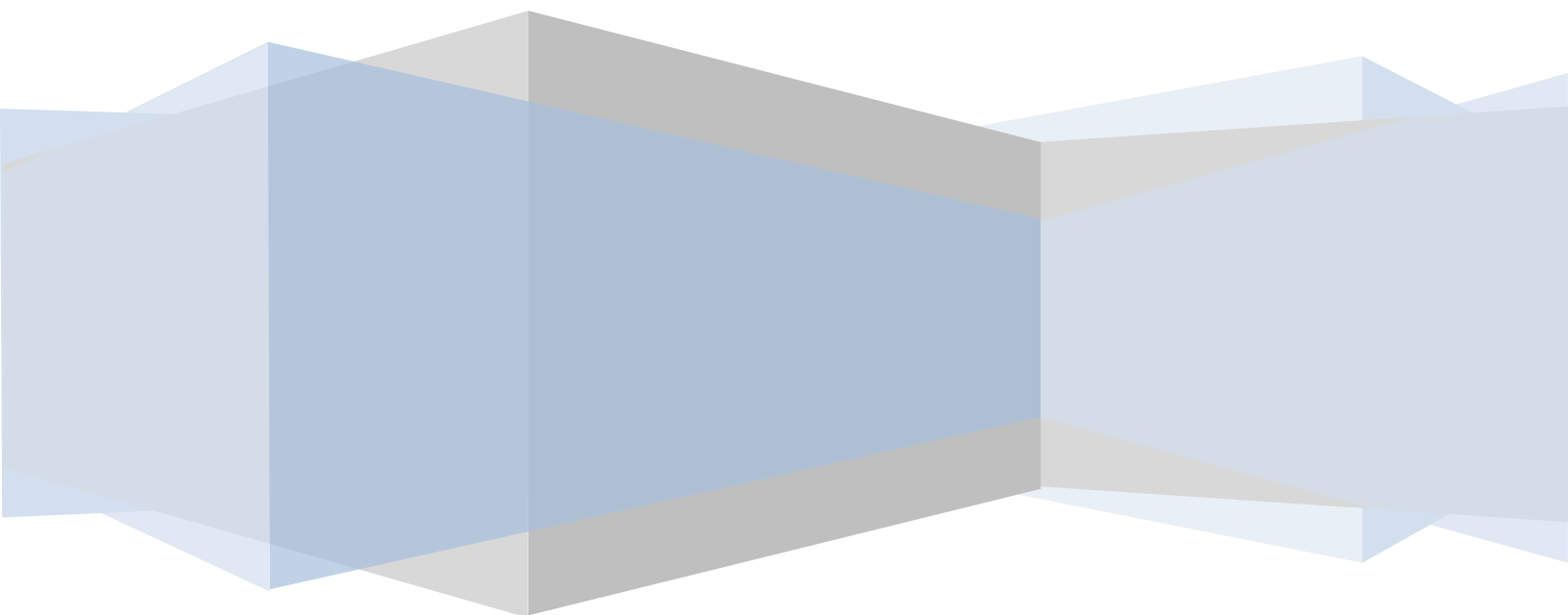


TNT intercultural and Leadership Development

Service: forming and living our faith

Theology of Youth Ministry

Tamara Thorpe



Let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. Matthew 5:16 (Life Application Study Bible, NIV, 2004)

Introduction

Allowing God to be revealed through our actions and living faith through deeds and service is the foundation of my theology to youth ministry. It is visible not only in my work in a church but all that I do. Scripture that I have held close to my heart is from Luke 6: 43-45 “A good tree can’t produce bad fruit... A tree is identified by its fruit... A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart... What you say flows from what is in your heart.” From an early age I have been drawn to and passionate about community development, social justice, peace education, and cross-cultural understanding. This passion for justice and equity is what connects me so deeply to the Christian faith and the life of Jesus. In Exodus 3: 7 it reads “The Lord said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt... and I am concerned for their suffering.” I have also heard this cry, so this paper explores how God has revealed Himself in my theology and ministry.

God’s Revelation in Youth

In the same way in which God was revealed in Jesus, He is in youth. Youth are driven by and inspire others through their creativity, passion, acts for justice, the questioning of authority and the status quo. Jesus was an activist and advocate; he paid attention to what society paid less attention. He tended to the most marginalized in his society; healing the lepers and the paralyzed and eating with sinners. He spoke with prostitutes, thieves and outcasts. The generation y’s or millennial’s, individuals born between in the 80’s and 90’s, are described as the most socially conscious generation to date. A recent report stated, “Millennials are civic-minded, politically engaged, and hold values long associated with progressives” (Leyden & Teixeira, 2007, p. 2).

Leydon and Teixeria also report that “Millennials show deep concern for today's income inequalities and social stratification...For example, they take concern for global warming and the environment as a given” (p.8). Through the life of Jesus, God called us to action, to fight for justice and inequality, and to advocate for the marginalized and this is represented in today's youth culture more so than ever before.

In modern history radical social movements are led by the younger generation. Just as Jesus stood up against Rabbis and Romans, the institutionalized establishments of his time, today's youth culture questions the establishment and believes in the possibility of changing society to make the world a better place. According to the aforementioned report on millennials, “The American Freshman survey showed 83 percent of entering freshmen in 2005 volunteered at least occasionally during their high school senior year, the highest ever measured in this survey. And 71 percent said they volunteered on a weekly basis” (Leyden & Teixeira, 2007, p. 3). This makes service, in many ways, a natural practice for young people to build faith. In an article by James Fowler, the origin of the world religion is listed as “The Latin world religio meant “to tie or fasten” (Fowler, 1998). In the bible it is written in Hebrews 11:1, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”. In youth ministry it is balancing act to create an environment in which youth feel “tied to or connected with” while challenging them “to be sure and certain about things they cannot see”. In my congregation, the youth programs theology was outlined by the Pastor Paul Taylor in 2004 as Community, Leadership, Faith, Service and Identity. Today, the youth ministry in my congregation is still grounded in that theology, a match for my own. Engaging youth in service as a spiritual practice is an opportunity to minister to them from a place where they are already comfortable and intrinsically motivated to participate.

My Personal Theology

Jesus was sent by God to be the embodiment, the flesh and blood, of God's love and teachings. Through his teaching of social justice and action I have experienced faith. In James 2: 14 it says, "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds?" and in James 2: 17 "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." My deep commitment to action is supported by my spiritual type identified in *Discover Your Spiritual Type*, by Corinne Ware. She describes four spiritual types, preferences in worship style for individuals and groups; Head, Heart, Mystic, and Kingdom. The Head type is identified by a connection to the concrete, the Heart type by what is felt, the Mystic by the unknown, and the Kingdom type is identified by a deep truth that arises out of action, to live out the gospel of Jesus in all that one does. As a Kingdom type, I feel most at home in both my worship, practice and faith formation through this call to action.

In Romans 12: 6 it states, "In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well...If your gift is serving others, serve them well." In a spiritual gift assessment, I scored equally in evangelism and justice, to be followed by leadership then discernment, faith, organization, teaching, vision and wisdom. My role as a youth minister is multifaceted and guided by my calling and gifts. I am a teacher, one who shares the good news of Jesus, the word of God, and instructs and offers a new vision for living in this world. I am a pastor, one who listens and counsels others with authentic care and concern and who offers an opportunity to share that with God. I am a Peace Maker, one who recognizes inequity and injustice in the world and does something about it. Lastly, I am a Godbearer, one who mentors others, is a beacon or light for living according to God's will. Following the words of Matthew, "...Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant" (Matthew 20:26).

Youth Ministry

Service is an opportunity for the youth to worship and respond to a need in the world. When the spiritual type assessment was taken by the senior youth group at St. Aidan's United Church in Victoria, four out of five of the youth were revealed to be a Mystic type, identified as people who find God to be "ineffable, unnameable, and more vast than any known category" (Ware, 1995, p. 41) and they are "focused on an inner world as real to them as the exterior one" (Ware, 1995, p. 41). In other words, youth are aware of something greater, and are attracted to the mystery and journey of faith, but veer away from the concrete. Therefore, my youth ministry theology grounded in serving others joins together our spiritual types and exploits the connection between my gifts and the characteristics of youth culture. There is also a focus on relationships in my ministry. This includes building relationships one to one with the youth, between the youth and the congregation and community, and between the community and justice.

This theology of youth ministry creates transformative faith building. Faith formation has been articulated into three best practices by John H. Westerhoff in *Will Our Children Have Faith*. The first is enculturation, faith development through experiences in the Christian community. The second is education which is the critical reflection on life and faith. Lastly are instruction and training, focusing on skills and knowledge (Westerhoff III, 2000, p.80). All three are important to faith formation, and can be applied in service learning in youth ministry. When youth are involved with community service they feel a connection to society and their Christian community. It offers sense of connection and contribution that builds confidence in themselves and something greater than themselves. Emily Miller, a youth at St. Aidan's United Church reported the following about being part of a community mural project with her youth group:

My experience while working on the mural was one of great community building, not just with the other workers, but also with the people in the community around us. Many people showed interest in our project, stopped to ask questions and watch us work, and many were eager to see the finished product. The nice thing about the mural is that you can really see the difference it will make even before you have finished the project. I am very proud of our finished mural and I like to show it off whenever I get the chance, it is wonderful to know that thanks to us a little piece of Victoria has been made more beautiful. To top it all off I would like to finish by saying that the mural project is really just a fun way of making friends and doing something great for your community.

Each opportunity, whether it is a community mural project or an evening at a homeless shelter, youth have the opportunity to learn and think more deeply about issues that are effecting others and how that relates to them as citizens, individuals and members of a faith community.

Additionally, service projects are opportunities for youth to develop their skills in leadership, project management, as well as faith and spiritual practices. In its various shapes, community service is a transformational learning practice for youth.

Conclusion

My faith has been cultivated by a call to action and inspired by the life of Jesus Christ. His life is an example for people of all faiths to be compassionate and responsive to suffering and need in the world. This call to action is felt strongly among youth, and while it may be challenging for some of them to feel a connection to traditional Christian worship services and scripture, reaching out to those in need and working collaboratively to serve is an accessible practice for youth to grow in their faith with the Holy Spirit. In Matthew 6:19-21 he writes, “Do not store up for yourself treasures on earth...But store up for yourselves treasures in

heaven...For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” When youth engage in service they report that it “makes them feel good”, they are storing up treasures in their heart through their acts of kindness and service. As a Godbearer, I teach, pastor and act for social justice and equity to encourage others to store up treasures in their heart.

Bibliography

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