

Missional Church and Youth Ministry: Integrating the Conversation

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“All too often, we think of the church simply as a building with programs aimed at making sure the church survives and thrives. On this model, people do everything possible to keep the show going. This view of the church is not missional.”¹
- John Perkins

The idea of “mission” and “youth ministry” is not new. In 2001, for example, the “Missional Approach” was one of the *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church*, and as author I opened the article by saying “Youth ministry as *mission* is defined as the community of faith corporately committed to caring for and reaching out into the adolescent world (of both church and unchurched young people) in order to meaningfully assimilate them into their fellowship... Since its inception, youth ministry has evolved out of a *mission* conviction.”²

The brochure for the AYME 2016 Conference includes this statement:

“(Y)outh ministry education should assist our students in adapting innovative and missional approaches ...(our speaker) will encourage us to reflect theologically and practically beyond traditional models of youth ministry...”

Three words that carry with them entire volumes of content and conversation – *innovative*, *missional*, and *traditional* – are at the center of what this year’s conference keynote is expected to bring. The term “innovative” connotes a new way of “doing,” as in how we train our students to go about the task of youth ministry practice, presumably in the parish. Therefore, when the encouragement to bring innovation is coupled with “should” and “approaches” it might be assumed that we have little choice but to consider different ways of not only “doing” but also teaching youth ministry. But *doing* is an outcome of something that drives it. Form follows function. Our practice is a reflection of imbedded belief or conviction. When coupled with the phrase “traditional models” the task may be to reflect in such a way that how we teach our students to *do* youth ministry must look different than it did in the past. Certainly, this is a worthy and important conversation.

At the heart of 2016 AYME convention keynote Alan Hirsch’s message, and indeed the entire missional movement, is less about *doing* than about *being*. In the missional literature to “adapt missional approaches” to youth ministry is much more than a mere realignment of

¹ John M. Perkins, “Afterword,” in Paul Louis Metzger, *Consuming Jesus: Beyond Race and Class Divisions in a Consumer Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 174.

² Chap Clark, “The Missional Approach to Youth Ministry,” in Mark H. Senter, III, *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan: 2001), 80.

practical and “traditional” models, methods, and strategies of youth ministry praxis. It is instead a “whole new paradigm.”³

In this essay I will examine a broad-stroke of contemporary youth ministry (what some may call “traditional”) practices and bring them into conversation with a general overview of the literature of missional movement. With a rightful nod to this year’s conference speaker, Alan Hirsch, I will also draw from such writers as Darrell Guder, Alan Roxburgh, Michael Frost, and N. T. Wright (and others) to re-think what Charles Taylor calls our “social imagination”⁴ in order to re-envision our role as youth ministry educators. In conclusion, I will make the case for youth ministry as missional practice toward the young – both church and unchurched – through the lens of the gift of invitation to the *oikos* (household) of God (John 1:12, Ephesians 2:19-22), what I call *Adoptive Youth Ministry*.

The Missional Movement

In his seminal work, *The Forgotten Ways*, to some the most significant of all books on the missional church, Alan Hirsch claims that the “missional movement is what Jesus actually intended”⁵ and “our very best thinkers have adopted it.”⁶ In what Hirsch refers to as “mDNA,” the six “quintessential elements” of what comprises the essence of the missional church, or, as Hirsch describes, “Apostolic Genius.”⁷ What Hirsch and others are up to is “A missional translation of movemental phenomenology into a form that speaks to postmodern, post-Christian, post-Christendom, individualistic, middle-class, market-based, consumerist democracies... I have spent a lot of time trying to adapt movement thinking into complex, existing expressions of the Western church and culture.”⁸ Alan Roxburgh describes Allenon, an expression of the missional church movement, as “a network of missional church leaders, schools, and parachurch organizations that envisions, inspires, engages, resources, trains, and educates leaders for the church and its mission in our culture.”⁹

As is obvious from even these two statements, the scope of this movement is difficult if not impossible to pin down into a list, or even to reduce the movement to definitive categories. That said, in order to engage the missional movement with youth ministry practice, I offer four descriptors of the movement that appear to be universally accepted by missional leaders, as well as a summary of “theological praxis” of the movement.¹⁰

³ Michael Frost, *The Road to Missional: Journey to the Center of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Baker Books: 2011), 17.

⁴ Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

⁵ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* (2nd ed.) (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), xxiii, “Preface to the Second Edition.”

⁶ Ibid., xxiv. An extremely confident comment not lost on the author of this essay. Such a statement allows little room for dissent; a characteristic of many missional writers I have encountered. Nonetheless, it is a perspective that many do share.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 7f and throughout the book.

⁸ Ibid., xxv.

⁹ Alan Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 9.

¹⁰ In committing to a careful literature review of the missional church, this list represents my own summary. Where I am perceived to be in error, or I have grossly missed or misstated a key perspective, I welcome input.

#1 The Missional Church starts with the Kingdom, not the church

Beginning with Lesslie Newbigin, a central hallmark of the missional church movement is the starting point of our calling is not the church but the kingdom of God.¹¹ This perspective is in direct contrast to how missional church leaders view the contemporary church, especially in the West, as being more concerned with and committed to the church than the *missio dei*. This, in turn, makes the contemporary church incapable of living into the call of biblical discipleship in a specific cultural context. As Alan Roxburgh puts it, “Now we are in a place where ecclesiology isn’t the issue. Missiology is... In the changing context of our time, starting with church questions (whether multisite churches... sticky churches)... takes us in all the wrong directions”.¹²

In sharing his own metamorphosis as he wrestled with the sweeping implications of what it means to be fully missional, Roxburgh had, like many others, a difficult time making the move from merely adjusting ingrained ways of thinking about and doing ministry to ultimately recognizing that such a response was in fact not missional at all:

“I interpreted Lesslie Newbigin and shaped the missional conversation as an element of ecclesiology... I lived inside a dominant story – the church is the subject and object of God’s activities – that shaped the ways I read the biblical narratives and how I responded to my cultural contexts.”¹³

To start with asking questions concerning the work of the kingdom of God and the activity of God in the world, and in a given current context, is the heart and soul of the missional movement. The question of what it means to be the church comes later. To simply add “missional,” the advocates universally agree, is to completely miss the point. To the missional theologian Newbigin, the recognized initiator of the movement, the “missionary steps out of the monologue. He or she isn’t preoccupied with self.”¹⁴ To respond to a missional calling with us as the starting point is the antithesis of the movement.

Theologian Howard Snyder puts this succinctly:

“Church people think about how to get people into the church; Kingdom people think about how to get the church into the world. Church people worry that the world might change the church; Kingdom people work to see the church change the world.”¹⁵

#2 The Temple in the World

To advocates of the missional movement, the church facility is *not* the temple. This may sound obvious, but in practice, especially in North America, envisioning the building where believers gather as God’s “sanctuary” (a term we often use) is actually a stumbling block to

¹¹ Roxburgh, *ibid.*, 34f.

¹² *Ibid.*, 27, 43-44. The reference to “sticky churches” is undoubtedly a jab at the recent phenomenon in youth ministry known as “sticky faith,” from the book and other materials produced by the Fuller Youth Institute.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁵ Howard Snyder, *Liberating the Church: The Ecology of Church and Kingdom* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1996), 11.

embracing the call to live into God's mission in the world. As Michael Frost asserts, the "not-yet-missional see the church building as the temple of Jesus and therefore they are deeply concerned about getting what goes on in there right."¹⁶ As some see it, this perspective is not limited to the "sanctuary" but also to everything that represents the church's place in the community, like the programs, the children's wing, and the youth center. Theologically, any first-year seminary student knows that "worship" is not limited to singing, or to a particular place or space, and that all believers are – both personally and corporately – in fact themselves the new temple, the dwelling place of God. Again, Frost reminds that "Heaven and earth now overlap through the incarnation and the whole earth is become the holy domain of the Triune God."¹⁷

Interestingly, in youth ministry history, the early pioneer Jim Rayburn, founder of Young Life, knew this and thus created a core missional principle that is still practiced in Young Life: Youth ministry is best done on the campus, in the coffee shops, and in people's homes. Although theoretically recognized as a promising programmatic strategy by most youth ministry veterans, in reality few see it as a theological necessity.

#3 All believers are vocationally agents of the Kingdom

As Galatians 2:20 proclaims, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." To the missional movement, the vocational calling of every believer is to participate in the kingdom activity of God. In Christ, there is only one vocation: to know Christ and make him known,¹⁸ all other activities are in service to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God. As David Bosch describes,

"Mission takes place where the Church, in her total involvement with the world and the comprehensiveness of her message, bears her testimony in word and deed in the form of a servant, with reference to unbelief, exploitation, discrimination and violence, but also with reference to salvation, healing, liberation, reconciliation and righteousness."¹⁹

To the missional church community, this kingdom focus and total involvement is not limited to a small handful of the faithful, but is an expectation of each individual member of the body. Every disciple is called to be an agent of the kingdom, and the church is the community of those entrusted with such agency. To the missional church, this "involves a commitment to continually reach out as God does, to partner with him in the unfurling of his kingdom."²⁰

#4 The Church in the Public Space

In Luke's account of Jesus's sending of the 72 (Luke 10), a theological portrait of how we as Christ's ambassadors are called to embody the kingdom, Alan Roxburgh asks the question, "Where is the church?":

¹⁶ Frost, *ibid.*, 116-117.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁸ A phrase of unknown origin commonly attributed to Dawson Trotman of the Navigators.

¹⁹ David J. Bosch, *Witness To The World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (2nd ed.) (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006),

²⁰ Frost, *ibid.*, 131.

“(The church) is not in a building filled with people just like us and it’s not in a building where regularly scheduled religious meetings occur. It’s in the homes of people who are largely outside of those meetings. It’s sitting at their tables, listening to their stories, breaking bread with them, and entering into a human dialogue that is not a well-rehearsed sales pitch. That is location of the church – in the public space.”²¹

To the missional movement, we are the church on the move, seeking to discern and follow God’s activity and to find our place within that. As Darrell Guder, former director of training for Young Life and later Academic Dean of Princeton Seminary, describes our location in the world as Christ’s witnesses: “By incarnational mission I mean the understanding and practice of Christian witness that is rooted in and shaped by the life, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus.”²² Jesus did not set up shop and invite people to come join him. Instead, the mission of Jesus was to go – into homes, on boats, in the vineyards and in the countryside, alongside ordinary people living their ordinary lives. This same injunction comes to us directly from the resurrected Jesus prior to his ascension: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). As we go a metaphor employed by some missional writers is that we go as personified “trailers,” as in film trailers, “of the New Jerusalem, a taster, with all the best bits on full display.”²³ This can only happen when we find ourselves, as Guder describes, by seeing ourselves and our calling as incarnational.²⁴

For the missional movement, this commitment is core, initially encouraged by Lesslie Newbigin’s foundational question, “What is a missional encounter with this culture?”²⁵ This eventually led to Roxburgh’s three key questions (which wholly resonate with the missional church literature):

1. What is God up to in our neighborhoods and communities?
2. What is the nature of an engagement between the biblical imagination and this place where we find ourselves, at this time, among these people?
3. What then will a local church look like when it responds to such questions?²⁶

These represent, then, the on-the-ground questions that missional communities seek to ask as they enter into the world as God’s chosen sent ones. As practical theologian Mark Branson says, “Missional formation concerns paying attention to our neighbors.”²⁷

In summary

²¹ Roxburgh, *ibid.*, 146.

²² Darrell L. Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church’s Witness*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), xii.

²³ Frost, *ibid.*, 29.

²⁴ This is a term that some theological scholars struggle with, as the Incarnation is a singular event that is not replicable. But Guder and many others have used the term to describe the church’s call to *go*, as encouraged by passages like Matthew 28:18-20 and John 20:21, and in Paul’s missionary model as described in 1 Thessalonians 2.

²⁵ A summary of Newbigin’s earliest thinking as found in Roxburgh, *ibid.*, 38f.

²⁶ Roxburgh, *ibid.*, 44.

²⁷ Mark Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry, Missional Engagement, and Congregational Change*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2016), 29.

Branson summarizes the “convictions” of the missional church movement as “a theological praxis that attends to:

- The Trinity – embodying difference, relationships, and sentness
- Grace – God is the initiator in our contexts
- Mission – as God’s initiatives to unite all things in Jesus Christ, into which we are invited as participants
- Neighbors – as subjects rather than objects; God is already engaged
- The people in the pews – as imaginative and gifted rather than as volunteers for master plans
- Geography/context – regarding the concrete presence of church people in the world with God among our neighbors
- Leadership – that shapes generative environments for discernment rather than offering romantic ideals and tactics²⁸

The missional church movement, then, is consistently focused on “*practices* that are interactive with such theological convictions.”²⁹ It is these convictions producing specific practices where youth ministry educators and practitioners can engage the missional church movement.

The Missional Church and Youth Ministry Praxis

The aforementioned brochure copy for the 2016 AYME convention leaves little doubt that at least some believe that this conversation is not optional, and that we must (“should”) “assist our students in adapting innovative and missional approaches.” What, however, does it mean for youth ministry, and particularly youth ministry educators, to engage the missional church conversation? Or, put another way, where do “traditional models of youth ministry” need to change to be more in line with the missional church movement?

I propose that it is not the relative traditionalism of youth ministry models, necessarily, that is the issue we must address, at least in initial conversations. Specific models, or strategies and/or structures of youth ministry, vary greatly in context depending on everything from denomination and history to resources and expertise. Regardless of ministry philosophy or the specific model used, instead of trying to directly replicate the practices of the missional church movement, I suggest that we in youth ministry education consider the four aforementioned characteristics of the missional movement to inform the practice of youth ministry in the following four ways:

Youth ministry education should consider re-imagining youth ministry as an expression of the *mission dei* by:

- Grounding youth ministry practice in the Incarnation
- Training practitioners for cultural engagement
- Exhibiting missional engagement to emerging generations by taking seriously the developmental realities of contemporary adolescence
- The trajectory of youth ministry result in full inclusion in the body of Christ

²⁸ Ibid., 126-127.

²⁹ Ibid., 127.

#1 Grounding Youth Ministry Practice in the Incarnation

Youth ministry, especially in the church, has with few exceptions been primarily practiced as a church-based program. Models, strategies, philosophies and ultimately programmatic structures tend to be in the service of building a parish youth ministry program. In a recent sampling of churches in a midsized city one of my students did an informal survey of youth ministry job descriptions (from those who actually had them). Although the method used was too anecdotal to be considered academically reliable (and yet demonstrated that a study of this kind would be helpful), the results were unanimous: every single job description was exclusively focused on perpetuating pre-existing programs of the church. *None* had a larger theological or even strategic outcome as a goal of the youth ministry program. In casually surveying youth workers across North America for the past year I find this to be consistently the case. Youth ministry, in practice, has become an event-planning and volunteer recruiting and training managerial position to maintain programmatic integrity of the institutional expectations of what youth ministry is supposed to be and look like. Presumably, youth ministry education has – at least in some ways – produced graduates who may be vocationally adept at fulfilling these expectations but little prepared to reflect theologically on why they do what they do. This would be the antithesis of the call and task of leaders in the missional church movement.

One of the greatest theological strengths of the missional church movement, in contrast to the job description of a youth ministry leader, is the almost complete lack of prescribed programmatic expectations. As previously explored, the missional conversation begins with the kingdom of God and not how we do or even envision *doing* church. The single-minded focus of the missional community is to discern what God is up to and join with the Spirit by eating, listening, going into the neighborhoods, the cities and the world as God leads. This mandates that leaders must ensure that all members of the community are committed to an organic flexibility when it comes to the doing of ministry. Granted, to train youth ministry students to be missionally-minded instead of programmatically-centered is counter-intuitive, risky, and upsetting to traditional church cultural evaluative rubrics, but this is what makes our work youth *ministry*.

For youth ministry to learn from the missional church, then, and as Alan Hirsch reminds, re-imagine the “forgotten way” of the earliest followers of Christ, we must educate and advocate for any church to care more about living the Incarnation than producing an institutionally and internally focused ministry product. Theologically, a Spirit-led community is never simply for us and is not something that can be programmed. As Jean Vanier, the founder of L’Arche communities for the severely disabled, said, “Community only keeps its meaning if it remains open to mission.”³⁰

To ground our practice in the Incarnational, then, means that we not only go about our youth ministry practice with a commitment to living as a sent out people, we also must lead young people into embracing this same understanding of the Christian life. To be incarnational is to go where the young live, eat, play, dance and grieve. This also means that we as educators, instead of preparing event planners and programmatic managers, must train youth workers to first model and then equip young disciples to understand that the point and therefore outcome of their faith is to live as active participants as agents of the kingdom in every day relationships,

³⁰ Jean Vanier, *From Brokenness to Community* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992), 49.

activities, and endeavors. Discipleship, then, has little to do with “showing up” to church programs and more about living among the real world of ordinary people as the Spirit leads.

#2 Training for Cultural Engagement

One of the most powerful economic forces that has been spawned and reinforced by youth ministry practices the last several decades is the rise of Christian youth culture, especially as located within Christian media, apparel, and literature. As youth ministry was gaining in ecclesial power, this led to a pervasively separatist way of thinking, rhetoric, and practice. Often coming from a place of fear of losing our young, and perhaps also losing control over developing adolescents’ hearts and minds, pastors, youth workers, and especially parents has fed the notion that the church can and should acculturate children into loyalty to the church through “faith-based” artifacts and messages that align with their belief. Their children, the thinking goes, would ultimately be able to withstand negative cultural pressures that may drive them from faith.

Unfortunately advocates of this Christianized “plow the road to protect the child” mentality do not take into account that society has a way of enveloping even the most culturally devout believing young person. The free access to “secular” music and other forms of entertainment, to pornography, and to alternate ways of seeing the world creates for almost every church-going young person a conflict between cultures where few guides are present to help them find their way. One glance at the advertisements on a “Christian” website, or a walk through the vender’s booths at a youth ministry convention reveals that “traditional” youth ministry, at least on the outside, remains a key source of energy for this consumerist machine. Ironically at the same time, youth ministry practitioners continue to reinforce the messages of the general culture, albeit often with the intention to “connect” with kids. Examples of this abound, like using clips from popular films in messages and Bible studies to copying skits and characters from Saturday Night Live. This, in turn, exacerbates this cultural dichotomy for adolescents when what they need are proactive guides who equip them to discern how to engage the culture they live in.

For young people to grow into a missional understanding of life and faith, no longer can we blindly affirm the religious culture of consumeristic separatism. Nor can we assume that students can wade through the cultural clash between their faith and the world within which they live. Young people are immersed in the popular culture, and do and will live their lives at the very least beyond high school (if not sooner) fully immersed in the pool of secular culture. Youth ministry must, therefore, proactively partner with parents and the church at large to help students to navigate living a life of sincere faith while living within popular culture.

#3 Taking seriously the developmental realities of contemporary adolescence

There is little doubt that a role, perhaps the most important role of youth ministry is for the adult community to missionally engage *all* young people first as recipients of the *missio dei* before they are thrust into front-line kingdom agency. While perhaps many in the missional church movement will not recognize how their basic theological commitments will translate to youth ministry in this way, seasoned youth workers know that while every young person is both gifted and called to engage in ministry they are not developmentally ready to simply be let loose. Recent studies have overwhelmingly demonstrated that today’s adolescents do need nurture even while we encourage them to give themselves away for the good of others. As David Elkind notes, every child is a victim “of overwhelming stress – the stress borne of rapid, bewildering

social change and constantly rising expectations.”³¹ There is ample research to support the notion that it is not some young people that are “victims of overwhelming stress,” but due to the increasingly atomization of society and the significant decrease of social capital, all have been effected³²

This means, of course, that just as the missional community takes engagement with ordinary people seriously, and by implication are therefore gentle and kind among them, so too must youth ministry leaders be trained to extend great care and nurturing kindness toward young people, both in and out of the church. How many times have students been wounded by an errant joke, or flippant conversation delivered by an otherwise trustworthy youth worker? How many young people have received no communication from their small group leader only to be texted when they miss a few meetings? As Paul described his discipleship methodology in 1 Thessalonians 2: “Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well” (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8). We must encourage and train to offer no less even while we invite them to actively participate in the kingdom of God.

#4 The trajectory of youth ministry should lead to full inclusion in the body of Christ while being actively missional in practice

Again, this may sound contradictory to the missional movement’s basic assumption that the starting point of all missional questions is the kingdom of God and not the church. That is true for those who are settled and secure within the protective and supportive embrace of the body of Christ. When it comes to those who are mature, to those who should know better, the missional church push is an appropriate, even vital, correction to the church-centeredness of the Western church. But for those who, for whatever reason, are disconnected, or vulnerable, or do not feel like they have a place at the ecclesial table, the mission of the body must also be directed toward them. This applies, then, to youth ministry.

When the young church found itself in the throes of intense conflict between two factions – those believers who were steeped in Jewish tradition and newly converted Gentiles who were not – the Apostle Paul made his case for unity based on the most prominent descriptor of our commonality in Christ: *we are family*. As the direct blessing of the Incarnation describes in John 1, in Christ we are given the “right (authority, privilege, blessing) to become children of God” (v. 12). We are conferred the gift of becoming siblings with all others in the *oikos* (household) of God (Ephesians 2:19). In essence, biblical theology overwhelmingly affirms that by faith we move from being an isolated orphan, lost (Luke 15, 19), without hope. In Christ by faith we are not only found and restored as *a* child of God, but as *children* of God. In youth ministry, this means that all young people need to be both embraced as siblings while being nurtured as *vulnerable* siblings. This I call *Adoptive Youth Ministry*,³³ where we encourage those who are in

³¹ David Elkind, *The Hurried Child* (25th anniversary ed.) (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press: 2006), 3.

³² For support of this view, see Chap Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today’s Teenagers*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Touchstone Books, 2001) and *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*, 2nd ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016).

³³ As described in more detail in Chap Clark, *Adoptive Youth Ministry: Integrating Emerging Generations into the Family of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), and also Chap Clark (ed.), *21st Century Youth Ministry: 5 Views* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015) and the

transition, are vulnerable, or who otherwise feel outside of the missional community of faith to live *into* their adoption in Christ alongside their siblings in God's household by being included as siblings, being nurtured as those who are still in transition, and being empowered to participate in the kingdom alongside the household of siblings.

In Conclusion

I just got off the phone with a distraught senior pastor with whom I had recently consulted. His dilemma? In making the move to living into a missional community way of operating as a church a few of the leadership were pushing back. Essentially their message was, "What about us? How can we be missionally incarnational as a community when we experience and exhibit so little community ourselves? What do we have to offer others when we ourselves feel so disconnected?"

The missional church movement, for all its externally focused commitment and rhetoric, assumes a healthy and vibrant community. In terms of youth ministry praxis the need for inclusive and vibrant community must not be taken for granted. Our life together as the *oikos* of God must be simultaneously nurtured even while moving into the neighborhood as the Spirit leads. The missional conversation does not preclude this focus, it in fact requires it. The church, to live as the gathered sent ones, must also ensure that no one is left behind as it goes into the world as agents of God's kingdom. This is the central role of youth ministry: we ensure that no young person is excluded from their rightful place as included participants in God's family where they are nurtured in their transition to adulthood and empowered in their agency.

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