

YMI Newsletter

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An Inside Look

I like the word "strategy". In fact, I got my church to call me the "Director of Strategic Planning" for a little over a year (I have another title now for my part time contribution). How did I manage that? As I was moving out of the Youth Minister position, my church still wanted me to be involved in some way. So, I gave my pastor a job description with a list of ten job titles and asked him to pick one. I placed a number of red herring descriptions in there like, "King of the Cubicles". I was hoping he would pick one of two that I felt were pretty good. He picked my favorite. You see, even that was "strategic".

I would like to think that we are pretty strategic in developing YMI, too. As I reported in the last newsletter, I have to be aware of the open doors God has put in the room. By the same token, I don't believe God wants me always just to wait for the next open door. We were born with brains, hands and feet. So, while I'm sitting in the room I tend to think of what the next step might be. I pray for God's wisdom - God's strategy - to be revealed to me.



So, one of the new strategies that seems to have bubbled up to the surface involves my time. As you know, I'm THE full time employee of YMI. We contract for coaches and instructors. Our board of directors is very active. My church gives accounting services in-kind to YMI. But, I get to keep the balls in the air.

I'm not complaining about this. I have learned a great deal. It is exciting work. But, the question is, "How do I get more done without working more?" Pretty good question, huh? Maybe it is one we all ask of ourselves. Working efficiently is much better than simply working hard.

To that end, I have been working on one strategy for over two years! I want to add a coaching coordinator to our staff (that would double the staff if you are doing the math). We have great field coaches. We could stand to do a much better job of training them and supporting them in their work. They receive occasional emails from me and we train them for one day at the beginning of their tenure with us. We have never paid a coach the full amount we have budgeted for them. That looks good when we are looking at our quarterly balance sheets. However, what that really means is that we have left hours of coaching on the table that our youth ministers should be getting. A coaching coordinator would ensure that our coaches are spending more time with their assigned youth minister.

So, I have collected \$26,000 in grants towards this position. I have just submitted another request for \$15,000 to a local foundation. My goal is to have a total of \$90,000 in grants and special gifts towards this position over a three year period, while we build our donor base to support the position after the third year. It is a great plan. What I have found is that there are very few foundations that fund the kind of work we do. YMI is a rare breed that simply won't fit in a lot of boxes. Therefore, I have developed an interim goal of \$40,000 to launch the position on a part time

basis. In the meantime, I have asked one of our coaches to do some of what we have outlined in the coaching coordinator job description in an attempt to wisely use those hours left on the table.

A second strategy that will help YMI function more efficiently is hiring recruiters. We now have 24 YMI alumni all over Florida. I'm banking that a few of them would be willing to connect with other youth ministers in their area to let them know about the great benefits of the Youth Ministry Institute. I am most excited about this because youth ministers trust other youth ministers with whom they already have a relationship. This will cut down on some of my travel and will probably prove much more effective, simplifying my job to that of a closer in most instances.

The final strategy came to me while eating lunch at 4 Rivers Barbeque (the best Barbeque I have ever had in my life) with a friend who had been interviewing for a youth ministry job in Montana. He told me about how he was contacted by a third party who interviewed him on the phone and checked all of his references. He, of course, asked them how the procedure worked. Evidently, this third party company would screen the candidates only to deliver a portfolio of the five best candidates to the church for a final interview. We could do that! I already give pre-hiring consultations with churches. We give a core competency assessment over the phone to all of our youth ministers. All we need to do is simply up the ante and offer to get churches near enough to the finish line where they will be most effective in choosing the youth minister that best fits their church.

It will be fun to see if any of these strategies pan out. And now you know a few of them. Obviously, I haven't really given up my title of "Director of Strategic Planning." It is still my favorite title! It just isn't on my business card.

Most Recently

Certification Ceremony

I love finishing. So, the certification ceremony in April is a highlight. This year our YMI finishing class included our first part time youth minister, our first volunteer youth minister and the first time we have ever had a wife and husband go through our program. It was a great day and well attended by friends, family and those that support the Youth Ministry Institute. Enjoy the pictures!





Partner Highlight

HUMAN eX Ventures

I have written about our partnership with HUMAN eX in this column before. As you may remember, they developed a youth minister interview which measures how our youth ministers utilize ten core competencies in their work. It has been a great tool for us. We created a developmental companion that allows our youth ministers to look at each core competency in depth through case study work and personal reflection. We give the interview at the end of their two-year tenure with YMI to see what areas show improvement.

Over the past six weeks, Dennison Bhola, a researcher with HUMAN eX, and his team have met over the internet with me and our team of assessors (those that we contract with to give the interview) for more than ten hours. We gave them recordings and coding from over 20 interviews we have given the last several years. They compiled the information and were able to measure the standard deviation and reliability of each interview question. I have no idea how they come up with the statistics. I'm not that smart. But, I think it is fascinating that they can measure the strength of the questions in this way. We went over each question, beginning with those that were least reliable, rewriting the questions and coding prompts where needed. In addition, we also added three new core competencies that we felt were missing from the original list.

The result is a much better interview covering the full breadth of what it takes to be an excellent youth minister.

An unintended, but valuable, outcome was the relationship we built with their team of researchers. We came to appreciate their knowledge and expertise. But, more importantly, we realized the high level of care they have for people and their desire to help people to become better at what they do. We also enjoyed a number of laughs.

Again, it was a reaffirmation that we have the right partner here!

Coming Soon

I am always excited about a new class of youth ministers in the Youth Ministry Institute. For the first time since 2007 we have a significant number of youth ministers signed up to start YMI before June 1. six youth ministers are enrolled with a large contingent still considering. My goal is always to have the new class signed on by this time every year. So, it is exciting to get closer this year. In addition, there are a number of churches in the process of looking for a new youth minister, some with whom I have consulted. So, this promises to be a strong class.

Amongst the group is our second volunteer youth minister to go through YMI. We have also experimented with a three year contract, offering assessment and coaching services in the first year while delaying the instructional training until year two and three. Our "experimental" youth minister begins instructional training in August. That experiment encouraged us to do the same for a youth minister who is finishing his senior year at Palm Beach Atlantic University. It also looks as if we will have a large cohort from the Melbourne area, which will match the large influx we had from Pinellas County two years ago and from Orlando five years ago. We have one person traveling all the way from Naples, which seems to be our longest distance traveled for any one youth minister.

Still to come are prospects from all over the state: West Palm Beach, Naples, Delray Beach, Winter Park, Starke, Orlando, Lakeland, Palm Harbor, Tampa, Bradenton and Clermont. There are always one or two wild cards that come to me from an unexpected source. One year someone called me the day after our Foundational Retreat (our beginning point for our new class) and said that he and his pastor just found us on the internet and wanted to enroll. I, of course, said, "Yes!"

It just goes to show you, that I never really know how God works in all of this even though I try my best to know!!!

Final Word

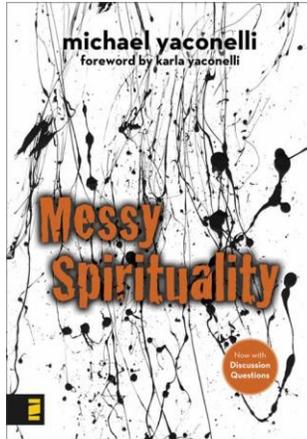
[From the YMI Guy's Blog](#)

Messy

I just finished reading a book for the second time.

Now, I don't know about you, but I don't go to see movies more than once or read books more than once as a general rule. I feel that once I know the ending (and the middle and beginning for that matter), I don't need to relive it all over again. So, I have read about five books a second time - The Bible, The Foundation trilogy (much better when I was 13) and Messy Spirituality by Mike Yaconelli.

I was drawn to Messy Spirituality because I gave away my original copy to a friend and wanted the chance to mark up a second one because the original was so helpful to me. It was a great second read.



I'm reminded that my spiritual life isn't a straight line trajectory. It is a meandering journey through wilderness and high vistas. It is bitter and sweet. It smells bad sometimes and great at other times. And, many times I just don't notice that I am even on a spiritual journey.

One of the many things that caught my attention in Yaconelli's book was Non Principle #4 of Spiritual growth - Reluctant Growth is Still Growth. He tells a couple of beautiful stories about people who were in situations where they didn't want to be and found God anyhow. These weren't burning bush experiences. They are experiences that come out of the normal rhythm of life and, sometimes, out of undesirable situations.

I think about my mundane life and how God shows up even when I'm not a willing participant. I reflect on ordinary conversations or simple acts of kindness that may not seem very significant, but at the very heart of the experience God was there all along.

In the last three months, my church has asked me to do a role that I'm not particularly fond of. It is part time and they saw some value in me doing it. I don't dislike the role. It just isn't a role I would have ever chosen. BUT (and there is frequently a "but" in my life), God has shown up in ways that have been surprising. I have received affirmation because I have helped others in their role. I have entered into life with people whom I didn't expect to enter into. I have learned a great deal about myself and have had the opportunity to grow in ways that I (obviously) wouldn't have chosen.

But (another one), it has been anything but clean! It is MESSY!!! It has been difficult. I have worked hard without always getting the results I had hoped. I'm not sure if my work is always appreciated. I'm not sure if I always appreciate it.

Wow, what life lessons, huh? They are lessons I would have chosen to avoid for sure. That's why it was important for me to read Messy Spirituality right now. I knew I was wading in the mess and needed to see the significance of it all.

So, the truth is that everything has significance and God exists in it all. It is up to me (and you) to discover for ourselves the meaning.