

# YMI Newsletter

## 2012 No. 6

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### An Inside Look

I am not scholarly. So, I am struck by the impact that YMI might have on the scholarly world. Some may laugh. Youth Minister Scholars may sound like an oxymoron.

Last weekend I made my third visit to Wycliffe Bible Translators. Their international headquarters are in Orlando. Their goal is to translate the Bible in all languages by 2025. What struck me in this most recent visit was the difficulty early translators faced when they attempted to take the Latin Bible and translate it into their native tongue. There was a severe financial cost and social cost that meant death for many. Why was death worth it?

Their goal, of course, was to make the Bible understandable to all who could read in their own language. This was a huge scholarly advancement. The Bible was no longer a secret. It was open to interpretation by those other than clergy.

Yesterday I left a conversation feeling as if I had unlocked similar truths for others to share in. Theological training is expensive! Of course, it is attainable in the United States. But, if you want the best, you have to go to some of the top seminaries in the country.

In January we will be offering the fourth and final theological core intensive course, church history. My goal, since we first introduced these courses two years ago, was to create a rich theological discourse over foundational subject matter - old testament, new testament, systematic theology and church history. That means I sought out different theological points of view within orthodox Christianity.

Brian Russell has taught our Old and New Testament classes. He works at a Wesleyan seminary and brings that theological viewpoint. Jon Grenz taught theology last year. I think he has had exposure to every theological point of view based on where he has worked and worshiped. Yesterday I talked with Ryan Reeves. Ryan teaches at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Ryan's Anglican background and reformed education qualifies him to tackle the subject from all sides.

I became more excited the longer I talked with him. Our educational philosophies matched. He maintains a commitment to applying knowledge to ministry rather than just knowing facts. His passion to use history as a lens to see the world today is contagious.

So, this is what struck me. Our youth ministers get to have these deep theological discussions without attending seminary. All of the sudden, the knowledge becomes attainable to some who don't even have an undergraduate degree or to those who would never be able to go to seminary. It is like those that read the Bible in their native tongue for the first time. There is a whole new understanding. I have witnessed it in the last two years.

Here is the impact. Our 16 youth ministers, then have the opportunity to share their knowledge in practical ways with the students with whom they work. And, they get to share it while the information is still fresh, while it is still forming, while it matters! They won't be in school another two years before they are able to teach a youth group on a regular basis.

It should be this way. We, the church, should invest most heavily in those that impact young people at the very moments they are forming their life long belief systems. It all makes great sense. And, I get to see it work up close. It is all very scholarly. And, I'm sure I could use words like "cohort" and "praxis" to describe the impact. But, hey, I'm a youth minister. All I know is that "It rocks!"

## Most Recently

A treat when we travel every semester is to find someone who is willing to spend some time with our group. I try to find someone who has written several books and has a connection with someone I know. I have only been turned down once in seven years. That one time is when I made the ask. Every other time I have asked someone else to do the asking or, at least, an email introduction to increase the probability of receiving a "yes".



This year at the Youth Specialties Convention Walt Mueller spent 90 minutes with our group one morning thanks to my friend, Joel Lusz. Walt runs the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding ([www.cpyu.org](http://www.cpyu.org)). He is a veteran youth minister, having started at a church in South Florida. Walt's organization compiles all of the research on youth. He then is able to interpret it so that teens and their parents are better able to navigate adolescence. It is fascinating work and immensely helpful as he is the only one doing it on this scale.

We had an informative time with Walt and appreciated his humility and willingness to engage with our group!

## Outtakes

Those who are closest to me have to endure my mistakes all of the time. I have a little bit of healthy denial going most of the time. But every once in a while my mistakes come out in all too public ways with people who don't know me well. So, I thought I would share a few with you. If they don't make you laugh, at least I have made a step towards ridding me of my denial.

The other day when I was writing Thank You notes to donors while waiting on my daughter to finish piano lessons, I asked my 7 and 9 year old boys for help in spelling a word that didn't look correct. This is how they spelled "suprise". Thanks, guys. That will be a surprise to whoever reads it. I'm still the one who wrote it, I guess.

After securing our second pre-hiring services contract with a church, I wrote a hand written note expressing how "I look forward to working with you." At our second face-to-face meeting everyone on the church's leadership council received a packet of papers including all of our correspondence to date. I reread my note. Evidently, my valley girl came out and I had written "like" instead of "look".

In Jacksonville last week, I was doing a pre-hiring consultation with church leadership. I was expressing how everyone needs to agree on the profile of the person they hope to hire. I said, "There needs to be anonymity!!!" I was emphatic. They politely pointed out that the word is "unanimity." No, at that point I needed anonymity.

This one I didn't get until months later. In fact, when I said it, the senior staff person couldn't stop laughing. I was genuinely embarrassed because I wasn't sure what I had said or done. One of the profile characteristics we use in a new hire is "Ministry Focus". I give five choices and ask the groups I work with to pick one. This group, though small, picked two. So, I said, "They both could be your foci." Isn't the plural for "focus" "foci"? After she laughed for ten minutes I thought, "Well, okay, maybe foci is not a word." It wasn't until months later that I realized that it couldn't be a concept either. Focus by definition is one thing! Focus, Steve, focus! By the way, "foci" is a word. We just shouldn't have more than one of these.

## Partner Highlight

Phil and Jane Easterling are two of our many annual donors. They are supportive with their words and their gifts. I was pleased to receive Phil and Jane's last donation with a note. No one had ever sent this kind of note with a donation. I wasn't sure what I was supposed to do with it. So, I am reprinting it here. You will understand why.

This check is for your Youth Ministry Institute: for our pledge, and for your best use - to honor our eight grandchildren:

Steven Keown

Joshua Keown

Abbigayle Keown

Grace Easterling

Olivia Easterling

Luke Easterling

Sebastian Easterling

Fabian Easterling

Thanks for all you do to educate and train these kind people who work with our youth.

It took me a few days to wrap my mind around this concept. But, Phil and Jane's gift literally honors their grandchildren. In fact, what we do is all about their grandchildren and children everywhere. Thank you, Phil and Jane and all of our donors. Thank you for honoring young people with your support of YMI.

## Coming Soon

## Annual Dessert Fund Raiser

*Empowering Youth Ministers to Become Skilled and Effective Leaders*

SAVE THE DATE  
02.11.13

# THE YOUTH MINISTRY INSTITUTE ANNUAL DESSERT FUNDRAISER

6:45-8:30pm • First United Methodist Church • 142 East Jackson Street, Orlando, 32801

*Please look for an invitation in the next few weeks. We hope you will be able to attend.  
Please email [steve@yminstitute.com](mailto:steve@yminstitute.com) regarding any questions you may have.*



[www.yminstitute.com/events](http://www.yminstitute.com/events)

## Final Word

### From the YMI Guy's Blog

Over Thanksgiving we had the map of Florida out on the dining room table. We were mapping the exit strategy for my brother-in-law and his family. He wasn't there, of course. It was just fun to see what the shortest route from St. Petersburg, Florida, to Wilmington, North Carolina, might be. The roads that look the most direct may, in fact, take longer given traffic lights, speed traps, etc. My eyes started to wander across the map of Florida a little bit.

I have traveled this state backwards and forwards for seven years. I have been to some desolate, out of the way places - coming back from the pan handle trying to utilize a "short cut" that took an hour longer but gave way to some beautiful countryside. I have crossed a couple of swamps. Alligator Alley at sunrise and at dusk is stunning. The Green Swamp doesn't even have a marked road on the map. The locals had to tell me about it. I traveled on that road at dusk for 45 minutes without ever seeing another car. Amazing!

My eyes then landed on a green space in the middle of the state. I said out loud, "I never have a reason to go through the Ocala National Forest." There aren't any good north and south roads and the east and west road goes between Ocala and Ormond Beach, cities that I would never put in sequence when setting up my travel.

After returning home, ourselves, that night from our Thanksgiving vacation, the local 11:00 news ran a story on a temporary tree cutting license being issued for the Ocala National Forest. People were allowed to pick from selected Sand Pines to use as their Christmas tree. My wife said I should go cut one down since we planned to purchase a live tree for the front room. I laughed. I told her it would cost more in gas for me to go get the tree than

it would for us to buy one from the lot around the corner. I went to sleep wondering who, in their right mind, would go up there to cut down a Christmas tree!

The next day it hit me. I had an appointment that night in Jacksonville and one the following morning in ... you guessed it, Ocala. I could pack my chain saw and a change of clothes and drive out to the forest on my way home on Monday. I could already imagine my \$7 Christmas Tree sitting in my front room. It reminded me of when I was six. My family lived in a three story house with a full basement, four fire places and ten foot ceilings. The place was enormous, especially to a six year old. That year at Christmas, my sister's boyfriend cut down a Christmas tree for us. I vividly remember everyone helping to bring this giant tree into our house. When it stood up, the top bent over at the ceiling. Note to self: Be sure to get a tree that is the right height.

So, I told my wife my plan, packed for my two day excursion and took off for Jacksonville, which isn't very near Ocala. By midnight I was in a hotel in Ocala, pretty tired from two hours of meetings and five hours of driving. I fell asleep dreaming about finding the perfect tree.

When I woke up I was ready. I went for a run, ate a good breakfast and prepared for my meeting. Everything was falling into place nicely. My meeting ended at 11:45, in enough time for me to get back to the hotel, change and check out. I called the Ocala National Forest and they said the Ranger Station was located 15 minutes east of Ocala. I stopped for some lunch and calculated my arrival. I should be back home by 3:30.

Okay. Here is the one thing I didn't calculate. Ocala is extremely wide for a small town. It took me an hour to get across it going from west to east. I called the Ranger Station twice. They kept telling me I needed to keep driving. I finally arrived at 2:00. I paid my \$7 and received directions to the tree plantation which was further into the forest. I was getting closer to Ormond Beach than I ever thought I would.

So, let me go back to Saturday when I heard the news item about the trees. In my head I imagined hundreds of people scouring the marked off section of the forest looking for the perfect tree. Not the case at all. There was no one. Well, there was me, of course, which brings me to my second miscalculation - no cell phone service. I hope I don't run into any violent "Save the Sand Pines" activist!



I found the tree plantation which consisted of a sign giving me permission to cut down a tree within the marked off section. I stood where the section started. I didn't see where it ended. There were hundreds, if not thousands, of Sand Pines. They were of all shapes and sizes, growing mostly in pairs, which made for some lopsided Christmas tree possibilities. The whole area looked as if had been part of a controlled burn and reseeded project. It was a beautiful day to go looking for a tree. The temperature was in the 70s and the sky was blue. So, I started looking.

I walked and I walked and I walked. I tried to memorize the skyline and the position of the sun in case I got lost. I kept walking. I imagined the headlines about some tree hunter getting lost in the forest. When I imagined my embarrassment at this, I would backtrack to my car and head a different direction. After 45 minutes of hunting, I found my tree near a burned cypress tree. It was perfect. It looked to be about seven feet tall. Of course it wasn't. It is taller. And, most importantly it had fullness on all sides. Apparently, this is rare when trees grow wild and untrimmed. I marked the spot, ran to get my chain saw and started planning how I was going to haul this tree back to my car.

The chain saw sliced the trunk like butter. I caught the tree with my free hand and began to lift instinctively. It weighed very little. So, feeling like a hunter who just bagged his kill, I hoisted my tree proudly on my shoulder and

carried it to the car triumphantly.

Sand Pines are wispy. Is that a word? There isn't much to them. They are light. The needles are soft and fine. In other words, if I had five Sand Pines on top of my car, it would have looked like I had done some hard work. This just looked like I trimmed a few limbs in my back yard and I was hauling them off to the dump. Embarking on this adventure, I imagined people staring at my car on the drive home. And, they did. But, the expressions I surmised to be more of a giggle than of awe. Oh, well.



The tree is now in my living room now. The lights are on it. We finished decorating it tonight. From the street it looks like the lights are hovering in mid air. There just isn't a lot of mass to this tree. But, I like it. It is my tree.

There is something to be said for things that require effort. I tend to appreciate those things more. And, this tree took me on an adventure I may have never experienced on my own, if not for all the circumstances aligning just right. I'm glad I was paying attention to the opportunity.

May we all recognize opportunities of all sorts this holiday season!!!