

YMI Newsletter
2013
No. 3

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An Inside Look

It all started with Jennyfer Norvell, a pastor at Central Christian Church in Orlando, Florida. I'll blame her.... uh, credit her for bringing me into this decade.

I have a number of problems - shortcomings, challenges, however you want to state it. One such problem (in certain circumstances I believe it is a strength) is that I like to create healthy habits. That means I get up at the same time every morning. I eat the same breakfast. I shave, brush my teeth and shower in the same order (that exact order). If I make my own lunch, it, too is the same. Why? So, I don't have to think about it. I make decisions all the time. These are decisions I have made once and don't have to make again. There are a number of decisions like that for me.

My meeting with Jennyfer early this summer was not outside the norm. After attending our dessert fund raiser the year before she had agreed to be a member of our board of directors. We are always looking for people who bring value to our board of directors either through a different perspective or unique skills and/or knowledge. I discovered Jennyfer knew quite a bit about social media. I knew we were under-utilizing that resource. Our meeting was meant to straighten me out.

She pushed and prodded me. My head was left spinning. We were further behind than I anticipated. Prior to the meeting I decided to devote 45 minutes two days every week to social media. Afterwards I realized it needed to be much more than that. Jennyfer said that I needed to be blogging on our web site instead of on wordpress. I didn't know how to do that without changing the web site. Even though our web site is a content managed system, I knew it had limitations.

So, then I made an appointment with a friend who is a well thought of web designer in town. I wanted to ask him about some of the items Jennyfer challenged me with and whether I could pull off slightly adjusting my web site. The first thing he asked me if I considered changing my logo.

What??? Now this is getting personal. The logo was like my morning routine. I made that decision a long time ago. I didn't want to make that decision now. He said some other things. Blah, blah, blah. I didn't hear anything else. Because, evidently my logo needed a fresh look with a more contemporary font and colors.

So, I went to work on the logo. After about 52 different designs we settled on a new logo. I hope you like the font. Because, I have been told that is important.

Well, changing the logo is like changing the paint on the walls of your kitchen. All of the sudden the paint doesn't match the floor which doesn't match the counters (luckily wood cabinets are still in). But, you better get some stainless steel appliances!!!

By January 1 the renovation should be complete. We will have a brand new web site with very active and expanded social media connections. We plan to blog on the site, upload short best practices videos turning our web site into a rich, textured source of great youth ministry information, each easily consumed in 5-10 minutes.

You will also be able to discover how to ask for a quote for our pre-hiring services, register for our next youth ministry training event, The Academy of Youth Ministry in January 2015, and find out what is going on at YMI Florida and YMI Midwest, our new affiliate.

All of that because of Jennyfer. Thanks, Jennyfer!

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Most Recently

YMI Midwest Launches

It is official. After a vote in late August by the YMI board of directors, YMI Midwest exists. One month later they



convened their first board meeting, electing officers, scheduling a fund raiser and setting goals for 2014. Matt Vaughan is the site director. Matt has been a youth minister since 1997. He has made over 60 appointments in the last six months to generate support, board members, partners and students.

Matt will work out of Kansas City. He will be working a region that will extend 4 hours (driving) in all directions reaching into Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Iowa and possibly Oklahoma and Arkansas. The first collection of YMI youth ministers in the Midwest will take place next August. His goal is to have 5-8 youth ministers in

his inaugural class. Let's pray for 12!!!

YMI Youth Ministers Take to the Snow

Sixteen people were part of the YMI entourage that arrived in Denver on October 2nd in our shorts and t-shirts, as Floridians are apt to wear. Our attire matched the weather. It was 75 degrees. Our drive into the mountains proved to be sunny without a drastic change in temperature. We reached our destination in Keystone, Colorado. The mountains and lakes were beautiful. We arrived to be part of the Refuel Conference sponsored by LeaderTreks. This three day gathering of youth ministers, most were from the surrounding states, is intended to give youth ministers practical skills to develop leadership within themselves and the volunteers and students with whom they work.

When traveling with YMI, there are always those who have never been to the location to which we are traveling. David Stump, a second career youth minister from Cocoa Beach, had never seen snow, having never traveled west of New Orleans or north in the winter time. On the third day a cold front moved in. We woke up to ten inches of snow. Our shorts and t-shirt weather disappeared. It snowed nearly non-stop our last two days in Keystone. Ironically, David was one of our three drivers. By the time I got to him to instruct him on the finer points of driving in the snow, he had already looked up some tips on the internet and had learned the proper way to downshift an automatic transmission.



Our final day with Doug Franklin, the founder of LeaderTreks, included a special "YMI Only" session on spirituality. It seems we should already grasp this. However, working in the church, preparing lessons, etc. sometimes distracts us from taking care of our own spiritual needs. It was a great close to our time in Keystone. Well, that and the numerous snow ball fights we had getting to the cars.

Partner Highlight

The Episcopal Diocese of Central Florida



I didn't know what to expect when I first met with Bishop Greg Brewer of the Episcopal Diocese of Central Florida. His greeting surprised me. He immediately dove into a discussion on why youth ministry was so important to him. He started his career in youth ministry and knew the impact it had on the many youth under his care. He talked of exciting events and great churches in the Diocese, who nurtured the faith of young people. I was very encouraged by him.

In that first meeting he asked me to speak at their Diocese Conference in a few months. I agreed, not knowing that I would be leading the morning and afternoon sessions for youth ministers from across the diocese. It was a great opportunity to solidify our relationship. That it did.

We have since added another youth minister from the diocese to YMI. Molly Peterson started work at The Cathedral of St. Luke in August. She is our youngest YMI participant at 21 (currently 40% of our youth ministers are under the age of 25).

I have since met with Bishop Brewer two other times on other matters. He pledged and gave a sizable donation towards a youth ministry training event we are planning in January of 2015. Since his donation the Episcopal Diocese of Florida and the Florida United Methodist Conference have also pledged sizable amounts to this event.

It is very important to the Youth Ministry Institute to have strong partners who passionately believe in empowering youth ministers. We feel very blessed to link arms with Bishop Brewer and the Episcopal Diocese of Central Florida.

Coming Soon

New Web Site

Look for some dynamic changes to our web site by January 1. We hope it will be easier to navigate. But more importantly, we hope for people who have never heard of the Youth Ministry Institute will land on it and be encouraged to interact with the site by asking a question of a staff person, signing up for a newsletter, responding to a blog post, requesting a bid for our pre-hiring services, registering for an event or applying to be part of YMI.

Final Word

From the Sabbath Hangover

The Greatest

I am fascinated by the overuse of certain words. For instance, I live in Orlando. "World" is used everywhere. There is, of course, Disney World (I believe they started the trend). SeaWorld may lay claim to the title, but it didn't catch on in San Diego quite as well. There is one in Orlando, too. We have the Orlando World Marriott Center (it is a hotel and convention center). Then there is the newly added Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Studios (they had to get in on the act). Then, there are the lesser known: Ski World, Speed World Dragway, Paintball World, Window World, World Automotive Services, World Bowling Center and, the most obscure, Viking World Orlando.

Enough already. It is akin to the use of the word "Super" in January and February.

I have been struggling with another word recently.

Great.

The Great Commission. The Great Commandment.

What if we were to pit these two against one another (realizing, of course, they are both valuable to the Judeo/Christian viewpoint)? From an ideological perspective I'm not sure which would win.

Many churches subscribe to the Great Commission as their trump card. "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20a) It is, after all, the last words of Jesus, his parting earthly challenge. We can interpret a fictionalized preamble by him as, "If you didn't hear anything else I said these last

three years, then hear this." After all we tend to remember the ending of stories, don't we? A great ending sticks the best.

I know many churches who operate out of the Great Commission paradigm. Southern Baptist churches focus (and do it quite well) on conversion and education. When it became stylish a few decades ago for Corporate America to adopt mission statements, the United Methodist Church voted "To Make Disciples" theirs. Many churches have followed suit, not wanting to appear heretical in their interpretation of Scripture.

Both Matthew and Mark record a similar version of the Great Commission (Jesus goes fishing in John and meets some people on the way to Emmaus, eventually catching up with the disciples, in Luke). Jesus sends out the disciples two by two with specific instructions in both Mark and Luke, preparing them to do ministry without him. But, otherwise the act of "making disciples" is mysteriously absent from the other accumulated stories of Jesus.

So, what about the Great Commandment? Why doesn't the church use this statement by Jesus as the filter through which all of our church rhetoric passes?

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37-39)

Both Matthew and Mark retell the story of the lawyer asking Jesus, "Which is the greatest commandment?" It seems odd that he didn't say, "Go make disciples," here.

Jesus is definitive in his answer to the question. In fact, he is quoting a familiar passage. It is part of the Shema. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Hebrew parents taught this phrase to their children for thousands of years. While Luke and John don't record this exchange, both authors record stories of love which become central to their understanding of the mission of Jesus. Many of the parables Luke records position the central character to extoll uncharacteristic love and understanding towards others, some of whom don't deserve the love and acceptance received. See the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. John records Jesus encouraging people to love others in many different instances. In total, the Gospel writers have recorded Jesus saying "love" 51 times.

What happens when the Great Commandment is not central to our thinking?

Judgement. We begin to select those that are checking all the boxes on their spiritual list, many times leaving out the ones who may need our love the most.

Integrity suffers. When our love for God isn't at the center of all of our actions, then we tend to make selfish decisions (both personally and corporately).

And, let's not forget the equation Jesus set up with the Shema. Jesus said that our love for others and our self equals our love of God. Said another way, if we aren't loving ourselves and others than there is no way we can love God.

To restate the lawyer's question, "Which is the Greatest?" The Great Commission or The Great Commandment?

The mission of making disciples is easy. It doesn't require an emotional investment. If we make one disciple we have accomplished the mission. We know we won't be able to reach everyone in the world. So, we can work our part of it the best we know how, using the gifts God has given us. It is important.

Loving others in the manner in which Jesus illustrated and lived is much more difficult. It challenges other contemporary values we have created. We value privacy, security and patriotism (among others). Sometimes loving others means these, and other values, will have to take a back seat. Decisions to love others who aren't like us or don't believe in the same things are much more difficult to make. Loving God with our whole being is scary. We can't do that a little at a time. It is all or nothing.

And, isn't that where greatness emanates? When we are "all in" great things arise.