

## An Inside Look

It was years ago. But, I remember college. Mostly I remember the fun I had living in the dorm and fraternity. But, recently I have had flashes of the last few weeks of a semester. I haven't broken out in a sweat or lost sleep, yet. But, you may remember what it felt like to have a term paper and several projects due at the end of the semester while beginning to study for final exams. The only saving grace about the end of semester experience was that it was guaranteed to be over after the last final.

I have five very large projects I am working on for YMI. I feel the pressure of self imposed deadlines.

### Web Site

We have hired a great company to design our web site. See the article below. I really wish, though, they could download my brain and write all of the content. The writing and editing is time consuming. I want it to be exactly correct. So, I find myself making sure the spacing and style is consistent. Details are important knowing the rest of the world will be able to view the Youth Ministry Institute. We are near the end, dealing mainly with a punch list and an occasional, "Can we make it look like this instead?"



### Curriculum Workbook

In October we visited Southwestern College, our academic partner for the last six years. Their administrators suggested we contact the American Council on Education. ACE, among other things, evaluates on-the-job training programs like ours, assigning collegiate credit to course work. While we have learning outcomes and exceptional instructors, we realized quickly we don't have a published curriculum piece. There is quite a bit of writing and design involved in this. It needs to be ready by the summer so YMI Midwest can use it also. I am halfway through the first draft. I'm sure there will be lots and lots of edits.

### Policies and Procedures

On December 31, YMI Midwest became a limited liability corporation, a subsidiary of Youth Ministry Institute, Inc. It is official. YMI Midwest exists (according to the government). I have learned a great deal in this process. Most importantly, forming an LLC is a three step process. Filing the appropriate documents in the most favorable jurisdiction (Delaware because of its treatment of non-profits) is the first step. After that our lawyer drafted an organizational agreement. Attempting to create it by our filing date was unrealistic. I believe we are on our final draft of the OA. Next is the largest item, writing policies and procedures, defining the intended brand of the Youth Ministry Institute. This takes a great deal of foresight. Again, I hope to have this written by the summer.

### Youth Ministry Academy

Next January we are planning our own conference. Fortunately we have gathered some great partners to share the responsibility of planning. Ministry Architects, the Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Diocese of Central Florida and the Diocese of Florida have banded together to insure a great event. We are currently on schedule with our

planning for this event. But, keeping it on the front burner is difficult because of the other three items above.

### **Recruiting Trips**

Oh, yeah. I'm starting to travel around Florida meeting with youth ministers. Each year I hope my meetings are efficient. I want to meet with youth ministers who truly care to be better at what they do. My prayer today was to have one great meeting each day I travel (I average 4-5 meetings per day). I have learned it is difficult to predict results. God is in control here. But, I still remain faithful to the responsibility I have in the process. Truthfully, I really enjoy learning about peoples' stories. My conversations reinforce the fact that youth ministers are called in many different ways out of a wide variety of circumstances.

There you have it - my task list. Of course, it doesn't include all of the day to day operations, following up with donors after our fundraiser, having lunch with potential board members and planning our commissioning service for those completing YMI. As this newsletter releases, I'm preparing a keynote address for a training event of several hundred lay people. I wish I could say all of the ideas swirling in my head were down on paper. Not yet. This coming Saturday is the final exam for this event. I pray that I am ready.

### **Most Recently**



#### **Youth Ministry Consultant**

I met Bishop Greg Brewer at Panera on a Wednesday morning in January. I had a general knowledge about what we were going to discuss. Youth Ministry. Bishop Brewer used to be a youth minister. He values youth and knows the important role the church plays in the life of youth. I wasn't fully prepared for the level of confidence he had in YMI to be the youth ministry consultant for the Diocese he serves. I soon learned what he hoped for the Diocese and how YMI will help. On the following Saturday at the Diocese Annual Convention I was announced as the Youth Ministry Consultant for 2014. After that day, I received a flood of phone calls and emails. It has been a great experience so far. I have traveled to Titusville and Vero Beach to consult on-site. I have had a number of phone conversations. I'm confident there are many great things to come as a result of this relationship.

#### **Successful Annual Dessert Fundraiser**



A record number of guests, 148, attended the Annual Dessert Fundraiser. All of our second year youth ministers shared specifically how YMI has helped them in becoming a more effective youth minister. Many who attended previous YMI fund raisers said it was by far the best one yet. We nearly reached our goal of \$15,000 from those who attended (checks are still coming in from our invited guests).

We also expect to receive another \$20,000 from those who did not attend. If you received a card and envelope in the mail, please send us your gift. I am always willing to live without the anxiety of wondering whether or not we will make our budgetary goals for the year.

Thanks for all who helped make the evening successful!

## Partner Highlight

### Episcopals, Methodists and Presbyterians! Oh, my!

YMI was founded on the principle of being multi-denominational. It just took us a while to get there. Evidently 2014 is our year to fully realize our connection to churches in a variety of Christian traditions. YMI is the consultant to the Episcopal Diocese and a United Methodist Conference, essentially serving as staff for both organizations. With the addition of YMI Midwest, the Presbyterian Synod of Mid-America has become a partner. The Youth Ministry Academy, a youth ministry training event next January will feature a professor from a Presbyterian seminary, a worship band from a non-denominational church, a spoken word artist from a Methodist Church. All of this is sponsored by two Episcopal Diocese, a United Methodist Conference, a Presbyterian church and the Ministry Architects (a consulting group embracing all the aforementioned Christian traditions). All I can say is: **FINALLY!**

## Coming Soon

### New Web Site



At the beginning of December we contracted with CT Social (ct-social.com) to design our web site (we have a new logo, too). Carolyn Capern and Greg Turjillo have done an outstanding job of coaching me through the process. Their ability to listen to my off-the-wall ideas has been impressive. However, even more impressive is when those ideas show up on the web site. They continually improve the function of the site. We are happy to retain their services even after the site is complete. After all, it feels like they are part of the YMI team. The new site will be up soon. We will let you know so you can visit. You will find it easy to be impressed!

## Final Word

### From the YMIInstitute Blog

#### 30-60-90

So, how many kids are coming to your youth group? How many do you have?

These are taboo questions in the world of youth ministry. We don't want to compare the sizes of our youth groups. Why? Somehow we have it in our heads that our expertise has a direct correlation to the size of our youth group. We hold those with giant youth groups in high esteem. They must be doing something we are not doing. Wrong. Wrong. And Wrong!



If we were to subscribe to the first century model of church, those that can comfortably fit into a house qualify as a church. So, a good church, back in the day, might range between 10 and 30.

So, what are the benchmarks of size for youth groups? And, what do we do when the youth group grows beyond the size our current configuration can handle?

**10-30** This sounds more like a motor oil than a range of potential youth group attendees. But, like motor oil this range is when a youth group operates at an optimal level. Groups this size know each other well. They often act more like a family than groups larger. Their bonds are tighter. They have the potential for a more holistic experience. High schoolers tend to mentor and care for the middle schoolers in a group this size. What might be sacrificed in depth of discussion because of the age range is replaced by living out the Gospel with one another.

**30-60** When the group consistently hits 30 in attendance, begin discussing how you might split the group. My first summer at one church, I took a mission trip with nearly 30 people. It was a great first trip. Upon returning I realized this group was going to be larger than 30. We immediately split the group and attendance spiked. Having separate middle school and high school lessons enabled us to customize the material based on the developmental needs of the group. To accomplish this, we empowered our adult volunteers to teach the lessons, choosing to bring the whole group together for announcements and worship.

**60-90** It took a decrease in high school attendance for me to realize the next plateau. We weren't able to stay above 60 consistently. And, it was our high schoolers who became more erratic in their attendance. The adult volunteers tended to connect with the same youth instead of getting to know youth on the fringes of the group. We moved to a small group model which meant more adults were responsible for delivering the lesson in a discussion format in the high school groups. These groups consisted of 15 potential attendees, usually averaging 8-10. With the middle schoolers we ended their group lesson with a 10 minute small group divided by grade and gender. Here they shared highs and lows and prayed together. As a result the group spiked to hover around 90-100 within a year.

**90+** Here is the plateau I have not been able to conquer. But, I have observed other youth groups grow to consistently be above this number. To get above 90, a youth ministry has to concern itself more with production aspects. Worship becomes a greater focus. It is more stylized and engaging. Videos and music have a more professional feel. There is a more corporate approach to youth ministries this large. Small groups are still important in this model. In fact, it may be more important in order to keep this size sustainable. The financial and people resources needed for this model are substantial but well worth the outcomes.

We no longer ask each other about the size of our youth groups. It isn't polite. But the number of youth coming to your youth group matter! You are responsible for creating the most optimal environment for young people to form their faith. There is no greater responsibility.

**Thanks for Supporting the  
Youth Ministry Institute**