

The Youth department work model¹

Although the quest for the *perfect* model is an endless constancy, its application can be adapted to all church levels in general, and to the Youth department intervention and action in particular. The model we have presented and tried to implement during the last five years has its root in anthropological and sociological hypotheses from post-modern youth and from the biblical and theological bases that we've been trying to put into action.

A model helps others to a quicker visualisation of how things really are their functionality, aesthetics and utility. A model will always be somehow surreal. In first place, it's always a simplification and can leave outside some important details by showing only the coolness of graphics and equations. On second place, it's a generalisation, which doesn't allow the detailed specificities of the individual, the entailed circumstances and rarely explains them. Anyway, to establish a model of action with youth "as a simple analysis of a particular approach to youth work²." However, the models to work with youth are presented to guide, to copy and to be used in different scenarios.

For some decades of a centenary story, for the international case, and octogenarian, for the Portuguese case, many models have evolved, even though for a majority in an unconscious way. Nevertheless, today we are the heirs of all. Each one has had its value in space and time.

Youth, although being a dreamy and beautiful time of each one life's, it's a period in which the individual finds himself more vulnerable in the battle for its one salvation. During this lifetime period, youth live a critical period in their personal development. Right in the middle of constant mutation's society they have to make their one life decisions, often in an intense and painful way. They face needs and specific languages, so different from the precedent generation. That's why they deserve a specific ministry.

"The youth need more than a casual notice, more than an occasional word of encouragement. They need painstaking, prayerful, careful labour. [...] There must be more study given to the problem of how to deal with the youth, more earnest prayer for the wisdom that is needed in dealing with minds."³

¹ Ruben de Abreu, "Relatorio do Dep. De Jovens, O Modelo de Trabalho do Departamento de Jovens" in *Revista Adventista*, 2007, p. 35-38.

² Pete Ward, Sam Adams and Jude Levermore, J., *Youth Work and How to Do It*, Lynnx Communications, 1994, quoted in *Journal of Youth Theology*, Volume 4, number 1, 2005, p. 68.

³ Ellen G. White, *Gospel workers*, Washington D.C., Review & Herald, 1948, p. 208.

Youth is a church challenge, for the position they hold inside it. They are an integrated part of God's people TODAY, but at the same time they are God's real promise for TOMORROW. So this work must be more than entertaining children, adolescents and youngsters. They are our ministry's goal. They are people whose faces we meet regularly: family, friends, neighbours, colleagues, church members. And "...your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost⁴." That's why his own and only son Jesus, was sent in a human form to die for our sins and resuscitate to a new life form.

In order to accomplish his mission, the church is forced to considerer today their work with youth, assembling all their living forces' effort, from the department⁵ structures to leaders, from families to general church members, and of course, to pastors.

God has designed a salvation plan. This plan was proclaimed in the most efficient way through the son of God's incarnation. "Jesus Christ is our model. As Christ left heavenly status and security to enter human life and a particular human culture, our Lord has sent all Christians (incarnationally) into specific cultures. ("As the Father has sent me, even so I send you," John 20:21, RSV.) Youth ministry takes its model from the incarnation in a special way⁶. [...] Those who want to enter the youth culture and communicate with young hearts should carefully study the model of Christ's incarnational ministry⁷. "

Today's strategy is the same as it was in the past. God reaches people by using people. The incarnational ministry, because it's a relational ministry, is the centre of God's plan to reach youth. That involves, in first place – not in second or third – a real encounter with Christ. A person can only give what she has. The one who ministers youth can only proclaim Christ and salvation good news when he

⁴ Mt 18.14, New International Version, <http://www.biblegateway.com/>, downloaded 13 november 2007.

⁵ It's clear for us that the first department mentioned is the Youth department; however an integration need of resources and efforts can lead to a greater efficiency. We're mentioning an approach of the Children's Ministry, because they come before us and their ages and the youngest formation top's us. We're also mentioning the Education department, to integrate our efforts in the moral and religion formation, since in our Union, the great majority of our students never had the opportunity to attend one of our schools. We feel the need to work together with the Families department, in educating and transmitting life principles, as the "mother-cell" of our children and youth development.

⁶ Dean Borgman, *When Kumbaya is not enough, A practical Theology for Youth Ministry*, Peabody, Massachusetts, Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 1997, p. XIV, XV. At the centre of the incarnational experience, we take Jesus Last Supper specific example, at the moment he wraps a towel around his waist and washes the disciples' feet. Through this action, he exemplifies a serving leadership, which could never be forgotten by those who lived it. John 13.1-17

⁷ *Idem*.

tries it in his one life. In the incarnational ministry, youth follows the leader in the measure he is *transparent*, so that Christ can be seen through him⁸. The one who ministers is always “herald, witness, and guide. His words, his works, and his person all bear witness to a reality that is beyond him, to something, someone, *else*⁹.” In first place, he is a follower to be able to lead afterwards, only where he’s himself led by Christ. To develop an incarnational ministry among youth, the leader has to allow Christ to be seen. It’s always a question of following the leader (Christ).

[...] Since the beginning, God created us differently from the red fish that just swims quietly in his aquarium. He created us with the thinking, feeling and acting capacities, like a three leg stool. If one leg grows more than the others it loses its balance. The several dimensions development has to take place harmoniously. This leads us to see each activity or action – including the entertainment activities – as a spiritual experience.

[...] Working among youth is just a flash from the great spiritual conflict. It’s a life or death question. That’s the reason why is so difficult to attain a generation after another. Responsibilities are huge. That’s why each action from those who work among youth has to take root in Christ, it has to begin, develop and end on your knees in prayer.

This text is a translated extract from the Youth Department Report, presented by the former Youth Department director (Ruben de Abreu), at the XVII Administrative Assembly of the Portuguese Union of Churches that took place in Lisbon on the 16-19 May 2007.

⁸ With the formula “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (I Corinthians 11:1) the apostle Paul encourages the ancient church to follow this principle, taking care to announce as well the dangers that it might contain – “Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.” Philippians 3.17-19

⁹ Robin Maas, “Theological Framework for Youth Ministry: Repentance” from the lecture “Christ and the adolescent: piper or prophet?” in *Starting Right, Thinking theologically about youth ministry*, Kenda Creasy Dean, Chap Clark and Dave Rahn (ed.), Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 2001, p. 234.