



EXCERPT



Sustainable Young Adult Ministry ***Making It Work, Making It Last***

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Young adult ministry can scare us, but what if it's not as enigmatic as we've been led to believe? Full of practical advice from their own experience (and a wealth of additional resources), this book from Mark DeVries and Scott Pontier explores six common mistakes churches make in their efforts to reach young adults, offering six paradoxes that return us to a simpler, more biblical ministry model.

Six Young Adults Ministry Mistakes

Mistake 1. Learn about young adults. Young adults today are unique enough from previous generations that it's almost as if they speak a different language. We won't get anywhere if we start our thinking with "when I was their age . . ." It's vitally important to take time to understand the demographic we're attempting to reach. However, churches make the mistake of simply learning *about* young adults by reading books, blog posts, and survey results without building any significant relationships *with* young adults. This generation is filled with paradox and unpredictability. The only chance we have to really understand young adults is to tilt the balance dramatically in favor of getting to know them *personally*, not simply learning about them abstractly.

Mistake 2. Change the worship style. Perhaps the most common and obvious mistake in building a ministry to young adults is launching a brand-new (often called "contemporary") worship service. This a terrible place to start. The process usually involves a church spending more money than it has but less than it needs to create a third-rate imitation of churches that have had this kind of worship in their DNA from the start. It's true that in most cities young adults flock to a church or two (usually those less than ten years old) with excellent contemporary worship. But it's a massive mistake for the average, established church to start a new service while assuming that such a change will make young adults flock to it.

Mistake 3. Expect the youth director to do it. Youth workers are great people. They're also typically extraordinarily busy. It's misdirected and seldom effective to assume that working with teenagers is the same as working with young adults. This approach may seem simple and economical, but it's the *quickest* way to underresource a ministry that almost always requires a concentrated strategy to succeed. If you want to do ministry "on the cheap," go ahead and start with the youth worker. If you want to establish a long-lasting ministry with young adults, start someplace else.

Mistake 4. Start by creating a young adult program. Young adults everywhere are asking for depth, diversity, impact, and authentic faith. What they *aren't* looking for is a group of baby boomers to plan their social events and offer spiritually focused lessons and speeches. Creating age-segregated, consumer-based experiences and calling it a young adult program is sure to keep your church in a spin cycle of disappointment. Young adults possess deep passion and are ready to engage the church and community. On a related note, asking young adults to sit in a room with other young adults and answer questions about what programs they'd like the church to provide almost never works.

Mistake 5. Wait until they're ready. Most churches place young adults in a leadership holding tank, expecting them to wait until they've paid their dues (translation: sat in the pew for a decade or more). We give lots of lip service to the need for developing emerging leaders, but frankly, most churches have absolutely no process (and no ideas) for integrating young adults into the fabric of the church, let alone into its leadership. Meanwhile, young adults lead in our culture with unprecedented entrepreneurial zeal. Most have stopped wondering why the church won't give them a seat at the grown-ups table and instead have found places to invest outside the church.



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“I don’t know of many churches that have truly cracked the code of young adult ministry, let alone the issue of sustainability. This book helps unlock the code and lays a clear path to a preferred future. Once you and your team have read it, do what the book says . . . put it down and go meet with some young adults who have so much to teach us. The future of the church depends on this.”

Alex Shanks, assistant to the bishop, Florida Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church

Mistake 6: Give up too soon. When it comes to designing and developing ministry for this generation, the church is just getting started. As a whole, we’re still in the season of experimentation and discovery, and too many churches have already called it quits. Stymied and mystified by the challenges of this generation, the church is equally paralyzed by the requirement of change that might feel too painful to endure. After a few reactive attempts, many churches sit back and declare “We simply can’t do it.” And so they do nothing. But as for a woman in labor, new life comes with contractions and labor pain.

—Taken from chapter one, “How Do You Solve a Problem Like Young Adults”



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BIO

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Mark DeVries and Scott Pontier
Author of Sustainable Youth Ministry

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“Once again, DeVries and the Ministry Architects team have demystified ministry in a way that leaves us feeling less concerned with how we fit into a pair of skinny jeans and more focused on the healthy (and accessible) habits that lead to a vital culture for ministry. If your experience is anything like mine, you’ll twinge at the accuracy of their common ministry mistakes, but you’ll laugh enough to know that you’re not alone. In the end, I had a punch list that left me feeling like effective ministry to young adults wasn’t so impossible after all.”

Trey Wince, director of new disciples, United Methodist Church of Greater New Jersey



Mark DeVries (MDiv, Princeton Theological Seminary) is the founder of Ministry Architects, a consulting team that helps churches and ministry organizations build sustainable ministries for children, youth, young adults, and entire congregations. He served for twenty-eight years as associate pastor for youth and their families at First Presbyterian Church in Nashville, Tennessee. He has trained youth workers on five continents and has taught courses or been a guest lecturer at a number of colleges and seminaries.

DeVries is the author of *Sustainable Youth Ministry*, *Sustainable Children’s Ministry* (with Annette Safstrom), and *Family-Based Youth Ministry*. He is also the coauthor of *The Most Important Year in a Woman’s Life/The Most Important Year in a Man’s Life*, and he has been a contributing writer for Josh McDowell’s *Youth Ministry Handbook*, *Starting Right*, and *Reaching a Generation for Christ*. He and his wife, Susan, have four grown children.

Follow Mark on Twitter: @markdevriesYMA.



Scott Pontier is a senior consultant at Ministry Architects, a consulting team that helps churches and ministry organizations build sustainable ministries. He is also the lead pastor of Jamestown Harbor Church, a multi-site church in western Michigan.

Scott has led multiple teams in ministry with high school and middle school students and helped form the Young Life college ministry at Grand Valley State University. He has also worked as a youth pastor with three churches in Michigan and Columbus, Ohio, where he oversaw the development of new ministries with college students and young adults. Scott served as campus pastor, developed a growing campus of eighteen to twenty-five year olds, and began college ministries on the campuses of Grand Valley State and Michigan Tech Universities. He’s also served as an executive pastor, designing systems of ministry for church multiplication.

Scott and his wife, Cindy, have two sons and live in the suburbs of Grand Rapids, Michigan. He is passionate about leading the next generation through equipping, leadership development, and church multiplication.

Follow him on twitter: @scottpontier.



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