

A Paradigm for Military Youth Ministry: IT WORKS!

There is no simple way to minister to adolescent students today and there are no magic formulas. Student's lives are complex, often too busy and in the midst of this they need desperately to know Christ and His love for them. To know Christ personally should set them on a journey, which will forever provide them the appropriate permission and boundaries to fully embrace all areas of life including Faith, Family, Friends, and Vocation etc. Our goal at MYM is that every student hears and has the opportunity to have an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

Youth Ministry in the Military must affirm all students' individuality but also each person's need to move toward God in ever more meaningful and deeper expressions. As you begin to pick leaders they must understand the pluralistic religious environment of military installations. The need will be to identify mature youth workers who will approach youth ministry from a traditional and historic Christian perspective and have the adult relational skills to acknowledge the priorities of the adult community. The necessity of being inclusive in the involvement of all kinds of adults and parents from the community will help you reach this goal. You will move forward walking a very narrow line sometimes but you will need to acknowledge the importance of being ecumenical and having a willingness to acknowledge that all faiths have recognized validity and no coercion is permitted in programming activities. The "incarnational and relational" style of ministry philosophy that you will need to adopt will "free" you to minister without guilt, expectation or demands from young people. The goal: gather and focus other adults who love Jesus right in front of kids to help them know Jesus.

Para-church ministry has a relational commitment that believes building relationships with youth is the key to successful youth programming. We call this foundational preparation "contact work" - going where youth are, caring, winning in the process the "right to be heard", being a friend, not critic, etc. This "youth style" characterizes successful youth programs around the world. Programs and student involvement from participation to leadership flow from such a supportive base. Below is listed a simple paradigm that expresses the visible part of ministry that will be seen by most adults and experienced by the students.

Outreach programming

Outreach programming is intended to engage and interest students who are CASUAL in their attitudes toward God. These events are fun and exciting. An example of this kind of event would be a pool party, retreat, ski trip, or soccer game. These kinds of events would not be programmed weekly. Instead they would be scheduled to take advantage of natural opportunities and parental/adult availability. Student involvement in the planning and development of outreach events is critical for success.

Nurture programming

Nurture programming is for students who are CURIOUS in their attitudes towards God and faith. Ideas and materials are presented from a historically Christian and Biblically informed perspective. Example each week we have Beyond Club. It's a fun, engaging, and stimulating atmosphere where students feel comfortable and invite friends. Due to the regular and demanding pace the nurture level is primarily planned, prepared, and executed by a team of volunteer staff adults.

Discipleship programming

Discipleship programming is the category of ministry for COMMITTED students. These are students whose understanding of Christ has led them to offer themselves, their gifts, and talents in service to others. These are the students who participate in assisting the adult staff in ensuring successful events by being involved and invested in the community program.