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DISCIPLESHIP  
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Youth Ministry Academy

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**SESSION 9**

The Youth Minister's Relationship  
Within the Body of Christ

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# The Youth Minister's Relationship Within the Body of Christ

## SESSION OVERVIEW

**Hopes and Expectations**

**The Ones You Love**

**Participating in the Body of Christ**

**Along-sidedness: Unity in the Body**

**Application**

**Exam**

**Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

## LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should be able to:

- consider and reflect on the nature of church relationships you currently participate in.
- understand healthy relationships as a single or married youth worker.
- understand the need to develop healthy relationships within the congregation.
- identify and consider ways of expanding your relationships.

## INTRODUCTION

This session explores the multiplicity of relationships encountered by youth workers within the Body of Christ. It includes considering the role of youth minister as a model, example, bridge builder, and reconciler in relationships with others within the church. The need for youth workers to maintain healthy relationships with their own families, the congregation they serve, and others in ministry is vitally important.

## HOPES AND EXPECTATIONS

### NOTES

The reality of youth ministry varies widely depending on circumstances. For example, are you paid? Do you work full-time for the church? Are you a volunteer in leadership? Do you work part-time for the church? Do you work with a team or are you on your own? Are you single or married, male or female? No matter what your circumstances the question of dealing with expectations within the Body of Christ can be a crucial one. What do you expect of your church?

- advocacy for justice?
- service to the poor?
- proclamation of hope?
- support for ministry?
- transportation for young people?
- attendance of other volunteer leaders?
- young people who will actively participate in activities?
- financial backing and a budget to work with?

What does your church expect of you?

- perfection?
- modeling faith?
- being a voice for justice and hope?
- absolute Integrity?
- all your time, energy, commitment, enthusiasm and longevity?

The reality for many of us is we usually have very high hopes for our church and ministries and they often have high hopes for us. Our cultures also impact our expectations. In some cultures it is likely that hospitality, open homes, intense amounts of time and participation in one another's lives is both permissible and normal. In other cultures it is more likely there will be rigidly scheduled times with limitations set on seeing one another and participating in one another's lives as a church family or youth group. Depending on where you start you may well have different questions to address when thinking about your relationship within the Body of Christ.



For many youth leaders there is never enough time in the week to do all they would dream of doing. There is also the added reality that trying to do all the church asks (and all they don't ask but seem to expect) can create even more pressure. Then there is the vision and calling the youth workers have for their own lives. The question of balance becomes a critical one for youth leaders to consider.

It is certainly true that deeply embedded within the idea of ministry is the notion of sacrifice but what does that mean in our culture? How does sacrifice mesh with the evidence young people crave stable, long-term relationships in order to understand their faith? How does the idea of sacrifice tie in with the biblical command uttered by Jesus to love God and love others as yourself? In Western culture the challenge includes balancing an appropriate amount of personal time in relation to the time spent with others, particularly youth. Other cultures view the relational balance differently often focusing on the nature of the relationship maintaining genuine hospitality or maintaining one's honor (or face) in the midst of relationships. Nevertheless, we need a sound sense of our personal identity in the midst of cultural expectations.

While it is an important idea, the notion of loving yourself taken to an extreme can certainly lead to selfishness and self-focus. On the other hand, embedded in the idea of loving yourself is that of discipline. Truly loving oneself means being willing to:

- reflect honestly on your life and practice.
- think holistically about your way of living.
- think about who you are, what you do, and why you do what you do.
- love others and be outward looking.
- live well within creation.

If it is true we must lead lives that demonstrate godliness, holiness, and balance, how is this possible? How can we help juggle our hopes for holistic lives with the demands placed upon us by the expectations of our congregation? Here are some suggestions gleaned from people whose lives are devoted to thinking about leadership:

- *Focus on Christ.* Develop prayer, Scripture reading, and habits of spiritual living.
- *Clarify expectations.* Sit down with your church leadership and your team you work and consider their explicit and implicit expectations for your leadership.


**NOTES**

- *Acknowledge tensions.* Be honest about the areas where you find it most difficult.
- *Build in seasons of time and rest.* Look at the long term view of your ministry. Have you built in Sabbath rest or time dedicated to retreat? Have you built in time for rest? Are you able to take a day away from ministry and be with friends?
- *Give and receive.* Recognize as you give of yourself you must also find places or people from whom to receive. Be willing to be gracious in receiving.
- *Surround yourself with strong people, build a team.* Resist being a one-person-show. Don't be afraid of other people who are better than you and can propel your ministry in other directions. Remember Jesus spent as much time with the disciples as the multitudes. Resist being the only one who can lead, make decisions, or set direction. Instead, cultivate key individuals who are equally strong as you.
- *Care for the weak.* Be a person who advocates for those who are different from yourself. Exercise compassion and learn the art of empathy.
- *Develop accountability and find a mentor.* Find someone to be accountable to for your thoughts, time, actions, and ministry. Find someone more experienced than you to mentor and develop you. Deliberately seek someone who will ask good questions of your ministry.
- *Build a system of support.* Recognize working alongside people in need can be draining. Seek out people who you can share in confidence with. Develop systems of support that are outside of your local church.
- *Put others first.* Think of those you love and put them first. If your friends never see you, or your family begin to ask questions about your time, remember people are always more important than programs. Attend carefully to the needs of those who love you.
- *Live holistically.* Take a lesson from Jesus and spend time alone. Take care of your body with food, sleep, exercise, and prayer. Remember we are created to be co-creators with God. Find time to celebrate and laugh as well as cry. In general seek to live a whole life before God. Love the world and learn to care for the creation you are a part of.
- *Learn to say "no."* Realize it is important not to agree to do every request. Learn the difference between the truly urgent and the seemingly urgent. Be available but remember we need to empower people we serve to develop and grow into interdependent not dependent human beings.



**NOTES**

- *Invest in relationships.* It is vital to realize youth ministry takes place over time. The fruit of relationships may not be immediately evident but the importance of allowing genuine relationships to exist between you and other leaders, young people, and your family will be a part of the transformation God brings about when people are in relationships with each other.

## THE ONES YOU LOVE



### NOTES

The way you live your life as a single leader or married leader is significant. You will be perceived as a role model for the young people you serve. Caring for yourself, accepting yourself, and learning to love yourself is vital. Being someone who cherishes and nurtures your relationship with God and with those you love will be one of the most significant things you do. This is because we are created to be in relationships, mirroring the Trinity, who exists in a community of love.

Regardless of whether or not you are single or married, ensuring you work well with other leaders is important. Developing appropriate relationships with team workers, people in your church, and expanding your circle of friends takes time and energy. It is important you discipline your life to do this.

#### *Single in Leadership*

As an unmarried leader your time is often perceived by others as less full or important and more flexible. Your own temptation may be to pour all your time, energy, and enthusiasm into the youth you serve. However, there are questions to consider. Do you have relationships with people of your own age and maturity? Do you cultivate these relationships? Do you love others and give your life to others in mutual relationships?

It is critical for single youth workers to develop healthy relationships with people who can give them support and love at a mature level. Your time may be slightly more flexible but you must discipline yourself to make time to nurture your relationship with God and others. You also must be careful to ensure your relationships with young people are not merely related to enhancing your self esteem or a way of masking loneliness. It is important as a single person to deal in healthy ways with your sexuality, the need for love, ways of sharing and shaping time, and cultivating relationships that will help you grow and be transformed. Incidentally, the last two sentences are equally true for married people.

#### *Married in Leadership*

As married leaders ask: To what extent does your family become involved in your calling and ministry? Is your husband or wife automatically involved? How do you discipline your time? How do you ensure you have the time and energy for your blood family as well as your Christ family? There is often an assumption of two-for-the-price-of-one in church settings. While there is some truth to that it



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is impossible to exclude the family. There is also an important reality that time devoted to being a wife or mother, husband or father is also important. What are ways you nurture a positive relationship with your family?

Your time may be slightly more rigid, so it will be important to strive for balance. Many marriages have been sacrificed on the altar of a youth minister's inability to say "no". You also must be careful to ensure your relationships with young people are not merely related to enhancing your self esteem. It is important as a married person to deal in healthy ways with your sexuality, the need for love, ways of sharing and shaping time and cultivating relationships that will help you to grow and be transformed. The last two sentences are equally true for single people.

*Protecting and Nurturing Your Marriage While in Youth Ministry*

If you are married you also must pay time and attention to your marriage. Does your spouse understand the demands of your ministry? Do you share a vision of your marriage that touches on time, money, and life-style? Do you have an open house policy? Do you spend time together privately, working on communicating, and loving each other? Do you deliberately set times when you are able to reconnect with each other? Listening to one another and reflecting deeply on one another's hopes and expectations of marriage and ministry will be vital.

The role of power and intimacy must be considered. Those in youth ministry often will be seen as having authority and power in a relationship with young people and other leaders. It is vital for youth leaders (married or single) to reflect carefully on their use of time and energy. Likewise, caring for young people (many needy) can lead to relationships that seem intimate. You must be diligent to guard against inappropriate relationships. Taking heed, guarding time, being ruthlessly honest, and allowing accountability partnerships to develop are all critical. If married, listening and responding to the concerns of your spouse is vital. If single, it is vitally important to have people you are accountable to. Finally, both single and married, beware. It is sometimes difficult to perceive the danger if we are too close to it.

## PARTICIPATING IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

### NOTES

The gap between our expectation of ourselves and the Body of Christ we are a part of can create tension and stress unless it is acknowledged and accepted. It is important to consider the hard issues of finance, time allocation, job descriptions, budgets, and so on. In addition, we need to consider the soft expectations of hopes for young people, spiritual development, relationship building, and so on. Although all of these areas are worth exploring, we are going to consider our own expectations as ministers and the lives we lead in several key areas.

The question of being a participant in the life of the congregation you serve is important. This speaks to a particular understanding of ministry: either ministry from above or ministry from within or below. In the church there has historically been some debate. Is the minister one of the congregation or above the congregation; leading from a different level or plain? As noted before, the idea of incarnational ministry has been vital in the understanding of ministry over the last few years. The leader ministers from within, alongside, and as one of the congregation. The minister is as likely to have weaknesses and needs as any other member of the congregation and is considered a participant first and a leader second.

The importance placed upon this view is derived from Scripture. Reflecting again on Philippians 2, the model Jesus Christ offers is one of coming among us, becoming flesh, being one of and with the people. Even though He was entitled to much more, He willingly chose to be clothed in human flesh and die our death. The idea of the incarnation serves as a model of our ministry. In the Body of Christ we are both a participant and leader; one who enters into the experience of the local Body of Christ and one who helps shape it. To be a participant in the Body of Christ expressed locally in your congregation, will mean several things. You will:

- be involved in the local church as she participates in what God is doing in a local area or setting.
- be called to love people and be loved by them.
- be part of the mission of God in the world and see how God is at work around you.
- take part in the disciplines and practices of the local church.
- take part in the projects of the local church.
- participate in the worship gatherings of the local church.

**NOTES**

- share in the Eucharist of the local church.
- disciple and be disciplined within the local church.
- seek to share in the vision of the local church.
- support the leaders and other members of the local church.
- recognize you are part of the Body of Christ formed around the world and reflecting Jesus to the world.

That's quite a lot! Alongside this list which is true for all Christian believers throughout time and space, it is important to realize it can be difficult for leaders to simply participate.

It is vital to share in the life of the congregation as a youth minister. You must. This takes discipline. It takes deliberately recognizing yourself as a servant and participant first. It means empowering others to share in the responsibility for the tasks you find hard to leave behind. It means sitting with the congregation and entering into worship. The importance of being an authentic participant is vital for your ministry and your health. If you cannot worship alongside your sisters and brothers in Christ, then you must reflect again on your role within the church and how you can be transformed into a participant in the community as a worshipper as well as a professional or a worker.

## ALONG-SIDEDNESS: UNITY IN THE BODY

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### NOTES

You are not alone. Though at times it is tempting to be like Elijah (1 Kings 19:9-18). The reality is there are other ministers in the congregation you serve. Spending time, sharing vision, praying together, developing systems of accountability, honing one another's skills, and listening to each other are all vitally important as you serve God. Not being afraid of other people's gifts and strengths is important. God calls all of his people to serve and equips them. The place you are called to serve deserves people who are of one mind. This does not mean having no arguments or being clones. Conflict is normal, even vital in the Church. Learning ways to be reconciled is essential. It is tough and demands thought, prayer, creativity, and perseverance. One-mindedness is the goal and focus of Christ.

The Christian Church has recently been marred by a sense of mistrust, disunity, and brokenness. Jesus' prayer for unity compels us to look to other local congregational leaders, to meet and talk, and share and pray with others who also long for Christ to be glorified. There is no need for a sense of competitiveness; rather, there is a need for a sense of common ministry. Learning from others as well as teaching them and sharing with others as well as listening to them are all vital in the Kingdom sense of being the Body of Christ.

We must focus first on the kingdom of God and second on what unites us. By centering our conversations on Jesus and working together for His sake, we are more likely to meet and pray and share and worship alongside one another. Certainly there are differences. Again, thinking biblically about Paul's descriptions of the body there is a little toe and an eyelash to be considered, but in humility regarding others as better than oneself, it may be that we can work together in unity not only within our own local expression of the Body of Christ, but also with others who are united in the vision of seeing Jesus as Lord of all.

## APPLICATION



### NOTES

1. Take time to write a ministry statement that responds to these questions:
  - What are the hopes and expectations of your ministry? Do they differ from your church's expectations and hopes? How can you gain clarity?
  - How can you improve in one area of relationship (your church, other ministers, other leaders, with your loved ones)?
  - Who can you identify as a mentor or co-leader? What steps can you take to approach him or her for support?
2. Identify at least three people in your life who provide healthy relationships beyond the life of the church. Do you have accountability partners?
3. If married, discuss with your spouse the church's expectations for the both of you. Do you agree?
4. Make a list of activities in the church where you can participate apart from youth ministry. Which ones provide both support and fellowship?

## EXAM



### NOTES

1. Youth ministers need to balance personal time with time spent with youth.
  - A. True
  - B. False
2. A youth minister's relationship with the church depends primarily on our expectations of the church.
  - A. True
  - B. False
3. Truly loving oneself includes \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. reflecting honestly on life and practices
  - B. loving others
  - C. living holistically
  - D. all of the above
4. The key to learning to say "no" includes discerning between truly urgent and seemingly urgent.
  - A. True
  - B. False
5. Nurturing your relationship with God and those you love may be the single most important thing you do in your ministry.
  - A. True
  - B. False
6. Single youth workers need to develop a healthy discipline and understanding of sexuality.
  - A. True
  - B. False
7. It is impossible to exclude the family, particularly the spouse, from ministry expectations.
  - A. True
  - B. False
8. Youth workers must recognize both the role of power and intimacy in their ministry.
  - A. True
  - B. False



9. The gap between our expectation of ourselves and the Body of Christ we are a part of can create tension and stress unless it is acknowledged and accepted.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
10. Youth workers need to worship alongside other members of the congregation.
  - A. True
  - B. False

## DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT

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NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Think about how your lifestyle as a youth leader impacts the people around you. Would you describe yourself as living a balanced life?
2. If single, share the issues most critical in developing healthy relationships with non-youth.
3. If married, share the issues most critical in developing a healthy relationship with your spouse.
4. Is it possible to be a leader and a participant? Why or why not?
5. How can you share in the life of the church as a youth leader but also as a member?