

# Advancing Disciplemaking in Ministry

In 2005, after having spent 10 years training youth leaders across the continent of Africa with Sonlife Africa, I was looking for a church that I could call my home and where my wife and I could raise our kids. We were invited to attend a service at His People Christian Church in Parktown North and we immediately knew it was the kind of multicultural and missional church that we needed to be a part of for the next season in our lives. Some time after we joined the church I was approached to step into the role of youth pastor. For the past 8 years I have been full-time youth pastor at His People Rosebank and my wife, Debbie, joined me on staff two years ago. This is the story of the journey of building a discipling youth ministry and it is intended to provide a framework for anyone wanting to advance discipling in ministry.

## 1. Survey the Land

Some years before my appointment I learnt from reading the book of Nehemiah that I needed to pray and seek God's face about my role in the ministry and become thoroughly acquainted with the history of the youth ministry at the church. I met with as many people as possible – both youth leaders, teenagers and church leaders to explore the history. Some of the leaders expected me to implement my ministry strategy but I believed it was better to spend time surveying the land and discerning together where God was leading us.

**Step 1:** Survey the land to find out what ministry has taken place and what God wants to do in the future. Talk to people, listen, pray, dream, search the scriptures, etc.

## 2. Craft the Mission

We gathered a group of people with a heart for youth ministry and together decided that we would adopt the same mission statement that the wider church was using: *We see lives, communities and societies transformed by discipleship in the Word, the Presence of God and the Power of God.*

**Step 2:** Find out what the mission statement of the wider church is and then invite a small group of leaders (adults/teens; staff/volunteers) to craft a youth mission statement. Ask God for direction and find key phrases to build the mission statement around. Then write it out.

## 3. Build the Process

The next step was to put flesh onto the skeleton of the ministry strategy. Once again we looked to the wider church and adopted the same discipling process they were using: **Engage – Establish – Equip – Empower**. If the church does not have a process then it would be necessary to create or adapt one to your context.

**Step 3:** Identify the process that teens will move through as they become followers of Jesus, grow to maturity and are equipped to minister among their peers. Name each phase in your process and create a visual representation of your strategy and track where teens are in their discipleship journey.

#### **4. Develop the Team**

A key part of our development process was working on building capacity for ministry and that meant that we needed to focus attention on the following areas of team development: (1) Staff: It is a difficult task to run a youth ministry in a church using just volunteers, so if the church is able to employ a youth pastor that is ideal. (2) Adult Leaders: We appointed a team of adult leaders who volunteered their time to the ministry. They were not able to attend weekly staff meetings due to work commitments, but they attended monthly leadership meetings. They provides oversight and help at weekend events and mentored teens. (3) Teen Leaders: We identified teens to serve among their peers and equipped them to be small group leaders and help design and run events on Friday nights and on Sunday mornings.

**Step 4:** Build a ministry team of teens and adults to lead the ministry, create descriptions of their responsibilities, and create regular meeting times for encouragement and development.

#### **5. Create the Environment**

We were then ready to develop an environment where the ministry would take place. The youth space was intentionally designed around our value of creating relationship with teens and ensuring a multi-purpose layout that does not feel like school or a pew-style church setup. We do have stacks of chairs in one area of the room, but the space is left free for teens to engage with each other around activities in the room such as PlayStation; fuseball; table tennis and pool. Bean bags, couches and other informal seating areas are scattered around the room. For our more formal teaching events, like on Sunday mornings we begin our meeting with no chairs laid out but when we transition to the teaching time we invite teens to pull up a chair or couch to sit on. We designed an image that captured our mission and painted it onto the stage wall. We display our mission statement on our notice board using an A3 colour print.

**Step 5:** Design the youth space around your values (connecting, worship, teaching, etc.) and include items that facilitate interaction among teens: games, seating, refreshments, etc.

#### **6. Implement the Ministries**

Over a period of time we implemented ministries for each of the four disciplemaking stages:

**A. ENGAGE:** The first phase in our disciplemaking strategy is to Engage teens by connecting with them and bringing them to faith in Christ. Our Friday night weekly ministry focuses primarily on this phase and is an opportunity for believers to bring teens that they are building relationships with into an event in which they can engage with others believers and with God. Here is an outline of an Engage event:

**6:30-6:45 Setup.** Those responsible for the night meet to walk through the night - set up any decor and get all the materials for the night ready. Those presenting the night are walked through the PowerPoint presentation that drives the event.

**6:45-7:15 Prayer.** Our leaders gather for a briefing about the event and what is required from them and we spend time praying that God will move in the lives of the teens.

**7:15-7:40 Chill.** This is our hang time where teens play games like Pool, Table Tennis, Foosball and Darts or just chill. The teen and adult leaders are encouraged to spend this time connecting with teens.

**7:40-7:45 Welcome.** We welcome teens to the night and ask any newcomers to come forward to be introduced. We ask them their name, what school they are from and sometimes a silly question like the colour of their toothbrush or something like that.

**7:45-7:50 Announcements.** This is a key part of the night as it connects newcomers and regulars into our wider ministry. We advertise our Sunday morning topic and the theme for next Friday night.

**7:50-8:40 Event.** Next we introduce the theme for the night, often with a video clip, and then we launch into the event. The theme for the term and the night will determine what happens during this time.

**8:40-9:10 Small Groups.** Teens move into small groups and newcomers are assigned to a group. Our small group leaders get the questions on Wednesday night so they can prepare for this time. We currently use 4 to 5 small group questions - the first one links to the event they just experienced and the rest take it deeper into spiritual matters. The time ends with prayer in line with what they discussed.

**9:10-9:15 Refreshments.** We serve juice and biscuits in summer and Hot Chocolate and biscuits in winter. Some nights the main event includes food but we generally still end with a drink at the end.

**9:15-9:30 Hang Time.** We allow more time for the teens to hang out or play games in the room but we end promptly at 9:30 so parents are not kept waiting in the parking lot.

**9:30-9:45 Departure.** We spend some time in the parking lot engaging with parents, making sure everyone has a lift home and also have adult leaders drop teens off which is a great way to engage with teens.

We create a theme for each Term to ensure that the 10 nights are connected to one another and not just random events. Some recent series include:

- \* The Online Friday Series – each week we focused on a different media platform (WhatsApp, iTunes, Snapchat, Google, Steam, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Netflix) to give teens a chance to connect with each other and get online with God.
- \* The Reality Friday Series – each week we used a different reality TV series (Survivor, Utopia, Star School, The Mole, Project Runway, Amazing Race, Hunger Games, Come Dine With Me) – to teach teens to be real with themselves, each other and with God.
- \* The ReCharge Friday Series – we designed this series to recharge teens after a long week at school with events such as: Pizza Night, His-Her Night, Dodgeball Night, Movie Night, Encounter Night, Chow Night, Talent Night, CrossFit Night and Power Night.

**B. ESTABLISH:** The second phase in our discipling strategy is to Establish teens in the faith. Our Sunday morning weekly ministry focuses on this phase. Here is an outline of our Sunday morning service:

**(1) Worship:** We start by worshipping together with the adult congregation and we exit the sanctuary when worship ends. After worship is finished there is a slide that goes up in the Sanctuary advertising our series (with the topic or character we are focusing on for that particular week) and it has our logo and it says: "High Schoolers are welcome to move to the youth room now!" This helps us catch new teens who are attending church with their parents and who don't yet know about our youth service.

**(2) Connecting:** Once we get into the youth room we wait up to 3 to 5 minutes for the teens to connect with their friends and also grab a chair to sit on. As they enter the room there is music playing and also a PowerPoint presentation is looping with photos that have been chosen from the Friday night event – this helps the Sunday congregation know what we do on Friday nights and also teens enjoy seeing themselves on the big screen.

**(3) Welcome:** A teen welcomes people to the service and ask newcomers to come up to the stage. They are then asked to share their name, the school they attend (sometimes their grade) and usually one silly bit of information about themselves – like their favourite colour or the colour of their toothbrush. Once they have shared this information about themselves, the person welcoming them will interact with the audience and ask: "What is their name?" and "What school do they go to?" And everyone has to repeat it back. We are then asked: "What are they?" To which we answer: "Family!" The next question is: "And what must we do to them?" To which we answer: "Love them". And the person asks: "And what else?" To which we answer: "Care for them." And finally the person says: And what else: "Don't chase them away!" The person is told to take their seat and the next person is welcomed - if there is more than one visitor on the day.

**(4) Offering:** A teen presents the offering message to motivate teens to give of their tithes and offerings and the box is sent around. This is a great training opportunity to develop teens towards preaching.

**(5) Announcements:** A teen does the announcements (there are overheads slides for each of these parts of the service to help keep things moving and prevent us forgetting any of the key items). Here are some items that are include: A challenge to like our Facebook page, to get their photo taken for the wall, a review of the Friday night event with a few select photos, a preview of the coming Friday night's event and the introduction of the preacher.

**(6) Word:** The Welcome, Offering and Announcements takes around 10 minutes which leaves us about 40 minutes for the ministry of the Word. A recent series was entitled Heroes where we have spent eight Sunday mornings focusing on different Bible characters (Joseph, Rebekah, Daniel, Hannah, Jonah, Ruth, Peter and Esther. A key focus of the term was to get the teens to get into the Word for themselves, to Connect with the life of that Bible character and discover for themselves keys to growing in their relationship with Jesus. Some Sundays included video, images printed and placed on walls, drama, reflective reading, narrated readings, small group discussion and report back, etc. Teens often get a worksheet to use during the service and we also made use of the chalkboard to capture insights that the teens learnt and reported back on from their small groups. We usually seat teens around tables – 6 at a table with no-one sitting with their back to the preacher – and this encourages the preacher to engage teens in the message and interact with each other at their tables.

**(7) Prayer:** The service ends with prayer and often a time of response or ministry before music is played as teens either hang around playing pool or foosball or table tennis or chat with their friends or leaders.

**C. EQUIP:** The third phase in our disciplemaking strategy is to Equip teens for ministry. As teens are being established in their faith we watch for those who are ready to be equipped to minister among their peers and we equip them through the following initiatives:

**(1) Equipping Sundays Series:** At least once a year our Sunday teaching series is designed to equip teens – either to minister to their peers or to share their faith with their lost friends.

**(2) Monthly Leadership Meetings:** Our teen leaders gather once a month on a Sunday afternoon for 2 hours with adult leaders to plan either the upcoming term or the next month's events. Each leader is responsible for one Friday night a term and work with a small group of Connect Leaders to plan and present Friday night events. These leaders connect with each other via a WhatsApp group.

**(3) Weekly Prayer Meetings:** All our leaders gather every Friday night for a time of prayer before the Friday event starts and this time includes elements of encouragement and equipping.

**(4) Equipping at Engage Events.** We use the Engage Event on Friday nights to equip teens for ministry - by having them take responsibility for an event in the term, planning and involving other teens in running the event and also serving as small group leaders on the night.

**(5) Equipping at Establish Events.** We use the Establish Event on Sunday mornings to equip teens for ministry - by having them do the Welcome, Offering, Announcements and give Testimonies - and even preaching.

**D. EMPOWER:** The fourth phase in our disciplemaking strategy is to Empower teens to minister. We empower teens by releasing them to serve in the following areas:

**(1) Small Group Leaders:** Teen leaders are each responsible to lead a small group on Friday nights – the groups are no larger than 4 or 5 teens and the leaders are given the small group questions a few days before the event.

**(2) Friday Meeting Presenters:** Teen leaders are given the responsibility to lead Friday night meetings (they may open in prayer, welcome newcomers, or MC the night)

**(3) Sunday Meeting Presenters:** Teen leaders are also responsible to present part of a Sunday morning service (they may do the welcome, announcements or share the offering message or even preach).

**(4) Small Groups in Schools.** Another aspect of ministry is to equip and empower teens to lead small groups within their high schools. We are currently developing and releasing leaders in 3 high schools and hope to add at least another school in 2016.

You can download material for all these ministries from:  
<http://www.ymresourcer.com/Programs.php>

**Step 6:** Identify the ministries or events you will present at each level of your discipling strategy.

### **7. Create the Material**

We created material for each phase of our discipling strategy – booklets that could be used to follow up new converts, establish young believers in the faith and equip workers. We made sure that the booklets were interactive, inductive, story-based and skills-based. We also branded the material with a consistent look and feel that was teen-friendly. You can download and print our booklets from: <http://www.ymresourcer.com/Programs.php>.

**Step 7:** Create or find material to use at each level of your discipling ministry.

### **8. Minister in Schools**

Teenagers spend a large part of their lives in school and that is the place where they are most in contact with friends who are unsaved so our discipling strategy should include high schools. Youth pastors can help run Christian societies, coach sport or find practical ways to serve the school. At His Youth we currently have active ministry in three high schools in our area and we look for opportunities to minister in local primary schools to reach learners in their final year of primary school. You can download our resource from: <http://www.ymresourcer.com/School.php>.

**Step 8:** Find a way to have a regular presence in schools in your area.

### **9. Pastor the Teens**

A key function of a youth ministry is to ensure that timely and effective pastoral care is provided for the teens that God has entrusted into its care. We are called to provide pastoral care to teenagers or their families who experience challenges like illness, medical operation or bereavement in their lives. There are times when we need to drop everything we are doing and move into crisis response mode to show the love of Jesus in a practical way to those in need. These efforts will have a profound impact on the life of the group, as well as bring a sense of closeness and cohesion to the group.

**Step 9:** Make it your aim to respond to teens or families in crisis as soon as possible.

### **10. Work with Others**

In our area, the youth pastors from different congregations have been meeting every month for the past 10 years. We spend time catching up around coffee and snacks, and devote the bulk of the time to checking up on each other's souls and relationship with God and family, praying for one another and spend some time planning our next youth event. We allow youth pastors from outside our geographic area to attend to observe what we do but encourage them to start something similar in their own area. We had a season where we met together as youth groups once a term where we played together, ate together, worshipped together and listened to speakers who share the Word of God. We also meet

once a year as youth groups either on a weekend for a social or sports event – some times it takes the form of an end of the year dinner, or a mid-year bash. We also meet as youth pastors at the end of the year for a dinner together with our spouses and here we reflect on the year together, honour each other and thank God for what He has done in and through us. We call our monthly gatherings as youth pastors the **Unity Fraternal** as it is a demonstration of the unity that Christ has called us to reflect in the city in which we live and minister.

**Step 10:** Make contact with youth pastors in your area and meet on a regular basis.

### **11. Connect with Leadership**

We work really hard in our ministry to ensure that we maintain a close connection with the wider church so that our youth ministry does not become a para-church ministry that teens leave when they graduate high school and never make the transition into the adult congregation. Here are some of our current initiatives: (1) Our teens worship in the main sanctuary with the adults each Sunday morning which helps they feel connected to the church. (2) As full-time staff we attend weekly meetings with church leaders to stay in touch with what God is doing in the wider church family. (3) We design ministries that do not conflict with church events. (4) We find ways to connect teens into the wider church through service or mission opportunities. (5) We keep church leaders informed about what is happening among youth. (6) We promote the ministry when given opportunities in church services or at meetings.

**Step 11:** Find ways to connect youth ministry more closely to the life of the church.

### **12. Develop the Covering**

We learnt along the way, given the spiritual attack we experienced, that it is critical to create prayer cover for our youth ministry and we need to wait on God to discern what He wants to do in all our events. Here are some strategies we use at present: (1) Leaders are encouraged to pray personally for the ministry. (2) We share prayer needs on our leadership WhatsApp groups. (3) Leaders gather before all events for prayer. (4) We share prayer needs each week with intercessors in the church. (5) We spend time praying during our leader planning meetings.

**Step 12:** Develop prayer covering for your discipling ministry.

### **13. Connect with Teens**

We are always looking for ways to increase our “airtime” with teenagers outside of our events so we do the following: (1) Getting adult leaders to connect one on one with teens (we budget so leaders can connect with teens in coffee shops). (2) Attending cultural or sports events at schools. (3) Connecting with teens when we do schools ministry. (4) Making sure that teens going through any level of struggle are met with on a weekly basis until they have worked through the issues. (5) Spending time fetching and dropping teens off after events. (6) Socialising in the parking lot before leaving after events.

**Step 13:** Find ways to connect with teens outside of the events that you present at church.

#### **14. Communicate via Media**

We make significant use of media that is relevant to the teenagers in our context. At present we focus on WhatsApp and Facebook and connect teens to resource material on a website. Here are some of our tactics: (1) We use the group's Facebook page (<http://bit.ly/Youth01>) to show photos of events and tag teens and link teens to sermon or event resource material. (2) We use a Facebook Preview group to have our teen and adult leaders preview presentations. (3) We use WhatsApp to plan events and share prayer needs. (4) We have a youth website (<http://bit.ly/Youth02>) where term planners, sermons or articles can be downloaded.

**Step 14:** Develop a social media strategy to assist your disciplemaking ministry.

#### **15. Refine the Strategy**

Over the years we have not been afraid to change our strategy or our disciplemaking tactics. We remind ourselves that there is no perfect ministry strategy and we can always improve. We keep reflecting on our ministry, adapting when something is not working or can be improved, visit other ministry to see what is working there and we attend leadership training events to improve our skills and approach.

**Step 15:** Make it your aim to keep improving your approach to ministry in the coming years.