

Ecclesia. Semper Reformanda.

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Ecclesia Semper Reformanda. No, these aren't the words to a cool youth group name. Though, Greek and Latin words are cool... and you can use them for your youth group. These words actually greet us as we enter the doors of Grand Rapids Theological Seminary, the seminary with whom we've recently launched the ministry we lead, Intersect. Ecclesia--Greek for the church. Semper Reformanda--Latin for always reforming, always learning, always changing to better intersect the church and her mission with culture. These are more than words to us. They characterize our heartbeat and what we hope to be our life-long passion.

Ecclesia--"Church" conjures up all kinds of images for most of us, some good, some neutral, and some bad. Stuffy old buildings. Shiny, mega, mall-like structures. Followers of Jesus past, present and future all around the globe. Embarrassment. Community. Family. Loneliness. Judgment. What images fill your mind when you hear the word? What perceptions fill your teenagers minds when they hear the word?

Semper Reformanda-- "Ongoing Reformation" is one of the constant threads that have been woven throughout the life of the Church. God's people have continually engaged in rethinking what it looks like to be the historical form of Christ in our cultural contexts. Reshaping the practices and expressions of Church is not an idea novel to the emergent movement nor for that matter, does it find its birth in the reformers like Calvin and Luther, though they serve as inspirational examples of what it means to reform the Church to intersect with culture. "Christianity began as a reform movement within Judaism, retained many Jewish beliefs and practices and quickly spread to distant regions of the Roman Empire" (Patzia in *The Emergence of the Church*).

As we minister to youth in and through the Church locally and globally, we are called to continue this great legacy of reformation. We aren't changing merely to change. We aren't reforming in order to be cool or rebellious youth leaders. Reformation is so much bigger than being relevant. It's a conviction to continually be forming and reforming in order to rightly embody the Story of Jesus and his redemptive plan to those around us.

What does all this look like? The implications are far-reaching and mysterious for youth ministry. At the start, we can resist replicating the latest and greatest programs from the "successful church" up the street; our leadership team is the one uniquely called by God to give our youth a local expression of "Church". We can resist the urge to embrace simple ministry formulas that promise success. We can also restrain from criticizing expressions of church that make us uncomfortable and resist thinking that we have the whole thing figured out.

As we resist temptations that block semper reformanda, we must also find ways to create an environment of semper reformanda. Every context is unique, but we suggest you might consider one or more of the following:

Cancel the Summer Missions Trip.

Maybe being reformational means we should "cancel" next summer's missions trip. Instead of raising \$30,000 for us to go do a project on foreign soil, let's raise the same amount of money and send it to a national church to empower their youth to do the same project. Let's reform our understanding of missions to realizing that God's Church exists all over the world and that the mission field is in our backyard.

Music-Free Worship.

In seeking to continually reform our students understanding and experience in worship, let's suspend all use of music in our shared worship times for a few weeks. Look for other ways for them to express their worship—like a painting wall, several moments of silence, poetry readings, etc.

Intergenerational Small Groups

Instead of perpetuating the idea that students and adults have nothing in common, why not put together some small groups that have 8 year olds, 15 year olds, 35 year olds, and 75 year olds....and take turns having people from all the various age groups facilitate the gatherings.

Study on your Study Day

Carve out a half or whole day a week to study, read, reflect and pray for no other reason than to enjoy God. Ask God to reform your soul and guard this time as your holy of holies.

A reformer invests in good thinking, struggles with how to make God's bride purer and God's Gospel clearer, and frankly, being misunderstood. Ecclesia semper reformanda is more than a title; it's the DNA, the passion and the life of a reformer that shakes them to the very core of their being.

Be encouraged, fellow reformers. While we might not say "Ecclesia Semper Reformanda" while talking with a student over coffee this week (though we might suggest you try it!), you are living Semper Reformanda through your continual commitment to understanding the emerging generation and by seeking to more effectively connect Christ to them in their contexts; you are part of a long legacy called "Church." May we never stop reforming. Ecclesia Semper Reformanda. Soli Deo Gloria (All Glory to God!)