

MIN641: Theology of Youth Ministry

GRAND RAPIDS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Fall 2008

Instructor: Steve Argue, M.Div. scargue@mac.com

Tuesdays 12:00-2:40 PM, Room 105

Office Hours: I will be available before and after class and upon appointment. You can contact Diana O'Connor at 616.222.1422 to schedule a meeting. Meetings over coffee are always a good thing.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The purpose of this course is to support participants toward delineating theoretical elements essential for thoughtful youth ministry. We will approach these elements through theological, personal, missional, and contextual considerations for ministry to adolescents in western culture. We will address this goal by: 1) Understanding and applying hermeneutical lenses embedded in a narrative theology; 2) Critically exploring concepts of theology that inform youth ministry practices; 3) Actively participating in thoughtful dialogue and critical self-reflection; and 4) Extrapolating concepts beyond the current conversation toward areas that are missionally relevant to the participant and potentially beneficial for the broader youth ministry community.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the conclusion of this course, participants should be able to:

1. Articulate a narrative and missional theology that is applicable for a youth ministry context.
2. Explain what personal transformation is and reflect on how to guide adolescents in their own formation.
3. Apply theological and philosophical findings and resources that contribute to thoughtful, informed, missional practices for youth ministry.
4. Critique current youth ministry methods, approaches, and programs.
5. Identify contextual considerations that effect and reflect ministry practice.
6. Cultivate a deeper sense of what youth ministry is for the participant, inspiring them toward their contribution to adolescent advocacy.
7. Reflect more deeply about the participant's own life, experience, education, and ministry.

READINGS

The following resources will serve as formal voices for our course conversation, along with additional articles and media as listed in the scheduled course journey.

- Arthur, Sarah (2007). *The god-hungry imagination: The art of storytelling for a postmodern youth ministry*. Nashville: Upper Room Books.
- Dean, Kenda. (2004). *Practicing passion: Youth and the quest for a passionate church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishers. 2006.
- Dean, Kenda & Foster, R. (1998). *The godbearing life: The art of soul tending for youth ministry*. Nashville: Upper Room Books.
- Donovan, Vincent. (1978) *Christianity rediscovered*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Root, Andrew. (2007). *Revisiting relational youth ministry: From a strategy of influence to a theology of incarnation*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP.
- Thurman, Howard (1976). *Jesus and the disinherited*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Volf, Miroslav. (2005). *Free of charge: Giving and forgiving in a culture stripped of grace*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Webber, Robert. (1999). *Ancient-Future faith: Rethinking evangelicalism for a postmodern world*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Due to limited time, we can't read all the voices that help us think about the theology of youth ministry. The following are offered for your continued pursuit.

- Borgman, Dean (1997). *When Kumbaya is not Enough: A Practical Theology for Youth Ministry*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.
- Brewin, Kester. (2004). *The complex Christ: Signs of emergence in the urban church*. London: SPCK.
- Clark, Chap & Powell, Kara. *Not-So-Secret Findings About Youth Ministry – Deep Ministry in a Shallow World*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids. 2006
- Clark, Chap, Dean K., & Rahn, D.. (2001). *Starting right: Thinking theologically about youth ministry*. Grand Rapids: Youth Specialties Academic Books/Zondervan.
- Grenz, S. & Franke J. (2001). *Beyond foundationalism: Shaping theology in a postmodern context*. Louisville-London: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Guder, Darrell L. (2000). *The continuing conversion of the church*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans..
- Jones, Tony (2001). *Postmodern youth ministry*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press.
- Livermore, David (2006). *Serving with eyes wide open: Doing short-term missions with cultural intelligence*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- McKnight, Scot (2004). *The Jesus creed*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press.
- Nouwen, Henry (1993). *In the name of Jesus: Reflections on leadership*. New York: Crossroad/Faith & Formation (Reprint edition)
- Senter, Mark (2001). *Four views on youth ministry and the church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press.
- Smith, Christian (2005). *Soul Searching: The religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers*. Oxford University Press.
- Walsh, B. & Keesmaat, S.(2004) *Colossians remixed: Subverting the empire* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Webber, R.W. (2007). *Listening to the beliefs of the emerging churches*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Wright, NT (1999). *The challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering who Jesus was and is*. Downers Grove: IVP.
- Wright, N.T.(2006). *Evil and the Justice of God*. Downers Grove: IVP.
- Wright, N.T. *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture*. HarperSanFrancisco. 2005.
- Yaconelli, Mark. (2006). *Contemplative youth ministry: Practicing the presence of Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan/YS.

COMMUNICATION

Communication with the class will be done primarily through the ANGEL utility used by Grand Rapids Theology Seminary. It is the participant's responsibility to be familiar with how ANGEL works and to ensure that all emails are forwarded to her/his preferred email. Should you have any problems, please contact your instructor immediately.

CLASS ATTENDANCE

The instructor believes strongly in the educational value of group dynamics, interpersonal experiences, and the course socialization process that is fostered by consistent attendance. Therefore, to encourage attendance, the following conditions may affect your final grade: one absence (for any reason) – grade same; two absences - grade lowers by one step (e.g. B+ to B); three absences - lowers grade two steps; four or more absences - failure. Any student who misses any portion of the class will be considered absent.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE & WRITING EXPECTATIONS

Inclusive language should be used with reference to human communities. “Man,” “men,” “he/his” are to be used when the clearly refer to (solely) male referents, not for mixed or indeterminate referents. Us “person,” “people,” or “he and she”/“his and/or her.” *This refers to classroom dialogue as well as writing.*

For further suggestions with regard to gender-sensitive writing, see: Casey Miller and Kat Swift, *The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing*. All papers should have subheadings within the paper for organization, be typed, size 12 characters, double-spaced, paginated, 1” margins, and error free.

PLAGIARISM

Copyright violation and plagiarism have serious ramifications for Grand Rapids Theological Seminary students, both legally (the former) and ethically (the latter). Unauthorized copying or use of copyrighted materials, including downloaded files of various kinds, can result in criminal charges and fines.

Plagiarizing another's words *or ideas* (i.e., passing them off as your own) can result in failure in the course assignment, failure in the course, or suspension from the program. For a fuller explanation, see the "Academic Integrity" section of the most recent version of the GRTS Academic Catalog and Miller Library's website under "[Research: Copyright Questions.](#)"

UNIVERSITY DISABILITIES STATEMENT

Cornerstone University will make reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities in compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Students asking for disability accommodation should identify themselves to the professor at the beginning of the semester. Students will then meet with Dr. Stephen Neynaber in the Cornerstone University Learning

COURSE JOURNEY

The following books/articles/resources/assignments are due by the day described. The class and class dialogue is dependent upon your preparation and it is expected that participants have done the reflective work to make a contribution to our conversation.

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DATE	TOPIC	BOOK	ARTICLE/RESOURCE	ASSIGNMENT
Aug 26 1.0	Introductions Syllabus overview What is theology of youth min?	Practicing Passion	Q: How shall we journey together?	
Sep 02 2.0	Theological-Personal-Missional-Contextual Lenses for interpretation. Snapshots for expression	Practicing Passion-Section 1 GHI- 1	Q: Is it possible to do youth ministry in a "postmodern world"? Article: Jesus' Call to Follow, Not Copy Article: Modification, Formation, Transformation Article: PS3, Thai, German, Jesus Article: The Heart of the Matter	Reaction Papers
Sep 09 3.0	Adolescent Passion and passion in the church	Practicing Passion-Sections 2-3 GHI-2	Q: Why are adolescents "leaving" the church and what should YM do about it? Ten Myths About Church Leavers – Alan Jaimeson	Form presentation groups (in class)
Sep 16 4.0	Christ Christ's Church	Ancient-Future Faith, Ch 1-10 GHI- 3	Q: What is the church's "job description" pertaining to youth ministry? Article: Hey Youth Group, This is My Body Article: We the People Article: New and Improved Article: Reclaiming the Fellowship Hall	Reaction Papers

DATE	TOPIC	BOOK	ARTICLE/RESOURCE	ASSIGNMENT
Sep 23 5.0	Christian Practices • Worship • Spirituality • Mission	Ancient-Future Faith, Ch11-19 GHI- 4	Q: What Christian practices might we reform/reclaim in youth ministry? Why? Ancient-Future Evangelical Call Article-Salvation Article- Mourning Over Youth Ministry Battle Cries Article: Pro-Bilingual	
Oct 30 6.0	Image of God • Formation • Disciplines	The Godbearing Life, Ch 1-5 GHI- 5	Q: What does an adolescent Christ-follower look like? Article: Proclaiming Salvation- Dean	Reaction Papers
Oct 07 7.0	Image of God	The Godbearing Life, Ch 6-13 GHI- 6	Q: How does youth ministry encourage adolescent Christ following? When does youth ministry get in the way? Article: The Failure of Youth Ministry	
Oct 14 8.0	Incarnation	Revisiting Relational YM, Ch 1-3 GHI- 7	Q: What is relational youth ministry, really?	Reaction Papers
Oct 21 9.0	Incarnation	Revisiting Relational YM, Ch 4-9 GHI- 8	Q: What does relational youth ministry look like in light if incarnation?	
Oct 28 10.0	Mission	Christianity Rediscovered GHI- 9	Q: Can Christianity be “rediscovered?” Article: A Journey of a Thousand Miles	Reaction Papers
Nov 04 11.0	Compassion	Jesus and the Disinherited	Q: What really is “good news” for adolescents?	Reaction Papers
Nov 11 12.0	Forgiveness	Free of Charge, Ch 1-3 (optional) Ch 4-6 (read)	Q: What does forgiveness look like for an adolescent? How do we help adolescents forgive?	Reaction Papers
Nov 18 13.0	Group Presentations		Content created by you	Ministry Reflections Due Group Presentations
Nov 25	OFF		THANKSGIVING BREAK- NO CLASS	
Dec 02 14.0	Group Presentations		Content created by you	Ministry Reflections Due Group Presentations
Dec 09	FINAL EXAMS			Final Journal Article

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Participants are expected to read and understand the requirements for each course assignment and honor the due dates assigned.

1. Participation and Reading Together: The God-Hungry Imagination (*Nothing. Everything.*)

Participants will come to class having read a chapter per week in this text. Each participant will be assigned to lead the class in a short reflection and discussion stemming from Arthur's book which we read together throughout the semester.

2. Reaction Paper-s (7 x 5 points = 35 points. Due dates indicated in the schedule.)

The participant is to write reaction papers for each required text except the book by Arthur. This is not a book review so do not simply summarize the book. Instead, make connections between the author's thoughts with your own thoughts and experiences pertaining to better youth ministry.

- a) Each reaction paper should be two pages (max) and the participant must indicate that they have read the book in its entirety (This is a "Yes, I read it" ... or "No, I did not read it" response.).
- b) While it should include personal reflections, adhere to good writing practice (e.g. introduction, conclusion, clear thesis, citations, etc). Consider...
 - o How can the author's thesis contribute to youth ministry?
 - o Give examples of how you see the concept being implanted in "real life."
 - o What problems or cautions might you offer?
 - o What does the author inspire you to explore more deeply?
- c) Reflection papers are due on the assigned date and participants will be asked to read their reflections to each other. Please bring a hardcopy to class. Late reflection papers will not be accepted.

3. Ministry Reflection (20 points. Due November 18, 2008)

In this section, please choose to complete one of the following:

- a) Serve with a local ministry, committing 3 hours per week over the duration of the semester. Service includes direct contact with students (as a small group leader or mentor). The participant will keep a weekly journal. Journal entries should integrate course concepts, and theological, personal, missional and contextual lenses, with weekly encounters offering thoughtful analysis. Submit your journal (10 pages).
- b) Serve as a volunteer at a weekend retreat sponsored by a local church. Identify the theological, personal, personal, and contextual elements surrounding students throughout the weekend. Reflect on what exactly the retreat is accomplishing, what you see as valuable and what you might do differently, based on concepts we are considering in class. Submit your paper (10 pages).
- c) Interview two adolescents, a youth ministry volunteer, and a youth pastor from the same ministry. Come up with questions that seek to understand the youth ministry's philosophy and practice. Assess the strengths and weaknesses in light of the concepts we are discussing throughout the course (10 pages).

Participants should submit their questions asked, their assessment of the youth ministry, along with recommendations regarding the youth ministry's theology. In your reflection, incorporate your thoughts, perceptions, and reactions, integrating the class conversations, online discussion, and readings up to this point. Communicate how are you making meaning of your experiences. Questions worth considering may be:

- What is the question this youth ministry is trying to answer?
- What theological concepts are most emphasized? What is missing?
- What theology is expressed well? What might be done differently?
- What are you learning about yourself and your perception of youth ministry as you synthesize your understanding of youth ministry and interact with participants in this youth ministry?
- What resources are informing your questions and view of youth ministry?

4. **Youth Ministry Theology Group Presentation (20 points. Due November 25 or December 02, 2008.)**

As a presentation team, participants will seek to address a particular theological issue that concerns adolescents.

The group presentation will be done in a training seminar format designed to help **youth worker volunteers** serve their students. They will, through incorporating concepts from the course, offer a seminar that is theologically sound, contextually sensitive, missionally relevant, and personally compelling. Teams will teach a theological concept that creatively and effectively guides and prepares the volunteer for serving adolescents.

The rest of the class will be the group of volunteers to whom you are presenting. Each presenting team will describe what kind of ministry they are presenting to so as to clarify the context. The class will give feedback to the presenting team after the conclusion of the presentation.

Each presentation will include the following:

- A one-hour presentation.
- A 15-minute period for Q&A (this can be open or guided by the presenting team).

Presentation will be evaluated on:

- The clear explanation of a theological concept that is relevant to youth ministry
- The demonstration and application of how this concept is essential to one's personal formation, and missional expression within their specific context. Include...
 - A clear explanation of the issue and why it's important.
 - The incorporation of the hermeneutical lenses and concepts discussed over the duration of the course.
- A handout pertaining to the topic that is creative and helpful to the volunteer.
- Participation and presentation from each team member.
- Effective communication through presenting, discussion leading, etc.
- Supporting material in the form of PowerPoint, handouts, etc.
- A bibliography of all the material you used to prepare for your presentation. This will include books, articles, websites, periodicals, media, etc. Please make copies for the whole class so that we might benefit from your work. Sources may include texts used in the course and should also have additional resources that reach beyond the course texts.

Each Team will turn in to the instructor:

- Their handout.
- A list of all resources used to prepare for the presentation.
- A statement signed by each team member on the amount of work each participant put into the project.

5. **Journal Article: Where Youth Ministry Must Go (25 points. Due December 09, 2008)**

Students will prepare an eight to ten page journal that offers a way to strengthen a youth ministry's theological posture. This journal is to be written to an audience of youth ministry practitioners and should address one theological concept and offer considerations for how to better embrace, change, embody the theological issue identified.

The participant is to explore an aspect of theology from a youth ministry context, discussing the issues surrounding your topic through offering thoughtful discussion on the implications of your topic and necessary ministry considerations.

In this assignment, each participant will be expected to identify a research problem or question associated with the theology of youth ministry. The approach to this problem or questions may be through a library research study or through an empirical study or a combination of the two. The overall focus of this paper should be to pursue in more depth some aspect of the theology of youth ministry that potentially makes a contribution to the field of youth ministry.

Participants are to write this paper as though they were submitting it to a youth ministry journal. They are encouraged to select a topic that relates to your overall interests but that also relates to the focus of this course. The paper should be eight to ten pages in length, draw from current sources, and be APA style.

Additional Guidelines for the Journal Article

State the problem

This paper will be directed towards an area of concern within youth ministry that is of interest to you and that relates to the theology of youth ministry. In describing this area, you should a) identify what it is; b) what makes it important for you and the field; and c) in what ways do you understand it to reflect issues of concern to youth ministry and the sociology of adolescence. The statement of the problem may reflect a ministry, educational, social, or leadership issue in youth ministry. If you would like feedback on the formulation of this “statement of the problem,” you may forward it to me via email and I will provide whatever feedback may be appropriate.

Re-theorize the problem

Pertaining to your problem, synthesize what we have covered in the course, and reflect on this problem within the context of the material studied. Given this material, along with additional research, how do you now understand the problem, and where might youth ministry need to go in light of theological, personal, contextual, and missional considerations? Give solid reasoning for your recommendations and offer practices that embrace the concepts you are proposing.

STUDENT EVALUATION

The final grade will be determined in light of the proportions indicated next to the assignments above. Remember that it is your responsibility to turn in your assignments on time.

Grading Scale

A	94-100	C+	77-79
A-	91-93	C	72-76
B+	87-90	C-	70-71
B	84-86	F	00-69
B-	80-83		

An Educational Manifesto:
How to Succeed in this Course
Operating Assumptions

1. I assume you have weighed and prioritized your competing values—e.g., family, work, ministry—before registering for this course, and that you are prepared for the entire semester to devote yourself to the necessary time and work required for this course.
2. I assume you are interested, motivated, and determined to be an active learner regarding the several topics and themes of this course.
3. I assume you seek both a theoretical and practical understanding of the course content in order to apply it meaningfully to present and/or future educational ministry.
4. I assume you regard learning as a *sacred* act—a privilege, not to be entered into lightly—and a *humbling* act—recognizing that you will learn from others' insights and experiences.
5. I assume you will be in the classroom early but no later than the official starting time—to develop a sense of community and relationship with the other students and the professor which is proven to benefit all concerned in our mutual quest for learning and growth.
6. I assume you will complete all weekly reading assigned before you arrive at class and will freely contribute your insights, questions, and comments so all may learn from your thinking.
7. I assume you will submit your writing assignments on the day and at the time required, and will not ask for exceptions.
8. I assume you will pursue topics, issues, and questions in this course related to your interests.
9. I assume you will sometimes not agree with the professor's opinions, perspectives, and views nor it is desirable to do so.
10. I assume you will regard your classmates as teammates and collaborators and, where appropriate, will share resources, advice, and assistance.
11. I assume because this school is not a church and admits people from many brands of Christianity that a diversity of opinion will be expressed, and will be welcomed and respected by the class.
12. I assume because this is an academic institution that friendly debate and scholarly exploration into ideas, even seemingly divergent ideas, will be the norm.
13. I assume honesty, self-discipline, creativity, and hard work in tackling the course requirements.
14. I assume you will study the syllabus for course stipulated requirements before you ask questions.
15. I assume to be stunned, enriched, and grateful by your presence in our course.

— Special thanks to Dr. Mark Lamport for this guiding Manifesto