

## Reframe the Change

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Read enough books, articles, and blogs. Listen to enough speakers and go to enough seminars and you'll start to hear a fairly consistent message: "Youth ministry has to change!"

Usually we're told there are two ways youth ministry needs to change. First, change is supposed to be a given in youth ministry. By its very nature, it's supposed to be about serving a changing demographic, "The only constant in youth culture" were told, "is change!" Take the changes in the adult world and quadruple them for the adolescent world. They live in a rapidly changing world and they themselves are going through stark change in the psychosocial, physical, relational, cognitive, spiritual realms. Carriers of this message claims, "Youth ministry that fails to understand the adolescent and the adolescent system cannot help the adolescent!"

The second familiar reason given for why "Youth ministry has to change" centers around the alarming call of living in the midst of desperate times. The mantras go something like this, "The postmoderns are coming!" "Adolescents are leaving the church!"; or "Students are biblically illiterate!" Carriers of this message call for radical measures to bring adolescents back to the church.

You may react positively or negatively to either one of these perspectives There's probably some value in weighing both of them. But we want to suggest that we often miss another essential perspective for reframing our missional work among students.

Could it be that we can sometimes become so worried about reaching, saving, challenging, directing, and incorporating adolescents into the system of "youth ministry incorporated" that we forget to step back and ask who we as a church are becoming in the midst of our changing landscape?

To what "church" are we asking adolescents to return?

To what "community" are we demanding they conform?

With what "world changing cause" are we connecting them once they are "reached"?

Before we worry so much about "changing youth ministry" let's put the spotlight on how we might need to change. What do we have to "be" in order to help today's adolescents "become"?

Consider this...

- Where are you spending your time? What does this communicate about your understanding of the Gospel?
- What relationships in the community do you have? Why these? Who are you including or excluding?
- Look at your budget. Where do most of your resources go? Why there?
- How do you value success? How does that affect what you do and why you do it?
- What does it mean for you to be a "youth leader?" How exactly do you view your role? How do you know it is valid?

Maybe what adolescents need from us is to change, to risk, and to become something beyond our current job descriptions rather than trying to fit them conveniently into ours. These courageous steps may reposition us to foster real missional change with adolescents... and beyond.

*Excerpt taken from Group Magazine September/October 2008*