

Beyond The Obvious

By

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Since the inception of the Youth Department, the directors in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church have always exceeded the obvious of their times. As we approach the second coming of Jesus Christ, this thrust becomes of paramount importance. We need to build upon our ancestors' visions by looking beyond the obvious as we enter the third millennial. Our current programs are great, yet we must not relax. It is essential that Adventist youth be challenged to finish the work of the gospel.

Facing the future with such a mentality requires us as youth leaders to shift our paradigm from program to people, and past to future. Business as usual must stop. It is obvious we have youth camps. It is obvious we have many youth activities. It is obvious we have outstanding Pathfinder programs, and it is obvious that we have an energetic Adventurer program. If we want to prepare our youth to face the future, we must move beyond the obvious and come up with programs that are "issue"- and "need-driven." There is nothing wrong with the obvious: uniforms, parading, or insignias. However, we are

losing too many young people despite the excellent programs we have. They are looking for more than the obvious. Let us build a youth ministry that meets the needs and issues affecting the spirituality of the youth.

Recent studies within the Seventh day Adventist Church have shown increased at-risk behavior among our youth. Many times some of these behaviors are not being addressed by the programs that are in place. We have taken everything within the obvious contexts. The programs we run must be built on our current strength and stretch beyond the obvious traditional boundaries. In the past, Youth Ministries has concentrated its efforts on producing quality spiritual products and services for youth leaders. It is becoming increasingly clear that such efforts, while necessary are not sufficient in themselves. Moving beyond the obvious calls for us youth leaders to inform and persuade not only the youth but those that deal with youth, including their leaders, church administrators, parents, and church members.

Our focus and priorities have changed with the societal problems that are endemic in the society in which our youth live. Aids, poverty, street kids, secularism, postmodernisms, New Age, drugs, single parent families ___ all force us to see farther than our own perceptions. Society is constantly changing. In order for our ministry to be successful, we must respond to the political,

social, and economic challenges that affect and influence our youth.

“Beyond the Obvious” calls us as spiritual youth leaders to move away from working above as a department to working together with other departmention the church. This includes youth administrators, pastors, educators, and ministries throughout the world church structure. Those involved in the youth ministry of the future must expand their vision of ministry.

For too long we have been isolated by the church or have isolated ourselves from the church. Youth Ministry has been seen by many to be just dealing with youth and running their programs. This has been a very unfortunate approach. To reach young people we reach those who work with them. We must not be simply specialists in providing programs, but specialists in ministry. The Youth Department must be a vehicle for the church to accomplish its mission. Spiritual youth leaders must be specialists in communicating the mission of the church to youth and communicating the needs of youth to the church.

The department, with such focus, will increase the spiritual emphasis of its approach to ministry rather than concentrating only on the mechanics of the programs. Faith development, conversion, commitment, training, and the

development of a lifestyle of service by our youth to accomplish the mission of the church will be the priorities of the department as we take up the challenge of moving beyond the obvious . Preparing our youth for Eternity. “ The youth in our day may be workers with Christ if they will; and in working , their faith will strengthen and their knowledge of the divine will increase”

(Ellen G. White , Testimonies for the church, Vol. 3, page 370)

Beyond The Obvious, calls for youth leaders, pastors , and church elders to challenge the young people with the word of God. Many times we hear from those who work with young people say “Youth are bored by church stuff” contrary to this statement when one asks youth what are they bored with at church they say “bored with leaders who do not challenge us”.

Youth want to be challenged. Give youth more than entertainment. As youth leaders with an ear of Beyond the Obvious, we are admonished to hear the cry of our youth: Youth are crying to our church saying

- We want to find real answers.
- We want to find Hope.

- We want to be challenged.
- We want to know God.

Please give us more than concerts, parade, insignia, uniform and other mechanics within the various Youth Ministry activities. The youth are saying, “Show us how to find the answer in God’s word!”

Youth Ministry has one goal and that is to save its youth and involve them in the mission for the church. Youth Ministry is not babysitting or entertaining. Many youth leaders try the following approaches:

- Hold young people in the youth society or club so that they do not leave church or join another church.
- Hold young people in youth society or club so that they do not go places or do things we don’t approve of - to keep them entertained under our control. And remember we are not suggesting that youth should not be entertained - entertainment should not be used as a long - term goal for Youth Ministry.

- Hold young people until they are old so that we can give them some positions in the church and teach them the Christian faith.

Youth leaders whose goal is to hold young people usually ends up catering for those who are most likely to leave at the expense of committed young people. Our business should always mold the character of youths into the image of Jesus Christ. That is our Ministry.

Beyond the Obvious one of its objectives is to place emphasis on Salvation and Service. Paul's goal in ministry, Colossians 1:28 was to present every person mature in Christ. The goal of Adventist youth ministry should be to present every young person mature in Christ. The goal is not to run programs or use methods, because they are merely tools we use to achieve the goal of leading young people to maturity. When the goal is maturity in Christ the youth leader is set free to use any method which achieves that goal. Neither is the goal to hold young people within the fellowship of the church; that is a by product of leading young people to maturity in Christ.

Beyond the Obvious challenges the way we think about youth ministry, because youth ministry is not only happening where there is a youth program.

It is quite possible to have a Pathfinder or Senior Youth/ Young Adult program where hundreds of young people attend smoothly organized activities and yet no-one is led to maturity in Christ. On the other hand a church may lack an organized youth group, so that people say it has no youth ministry; yet, through personal relationships, young people are led to maturity in Christ that is beyond the obvious.

Beyond the obvious challenges our youth to move out of comfortable faith into challenging faith. It might be more of a sin to suggest to young people that the Christian life is always fun and never boring. Christian faith may begin on the mountain top, but Christian character is formed in the crucible pain. Mature Christian adults, then, are those people who no longer depend on “Whistles and bells” or “mom and daddy” to motivate them to live out their faith.

Young men and women become proactive Christians__ not reactive. When young people grow up to be reactive Christian adults, they are constantly waiting for someone or something to attract them to involve them , to impress them . A reactive Christian youth puts the responsibility for his spiritual life on someone else.

Could it be that our church youth programs and publicity may , infact be

moving teens away from, rather than toward mature Christian adulthood?

Today we are fighting for young people, including the small young ones of the church. “Youth Ministry” has to be reinvented for the needs and wavelengths of a whole new youth world. Some basics have not changed and they never will. In other areas, today’s youth leader needs fresh thinking, plowing a new path where the old “young people’s group” used to sit. Beyond the obvious mentality recognizes that the youth society is “base camp” for the Adventist young people who are the frontline soldiers in the battle for their generation. It is a “field hospital” for the many wounded kids. And it must be the redeeming place where Satan’s prisoners of war are attracted as set free. Mrs Ellen White, rightly said it, “we have an army

The Bible clearly shows the need of prayers in the lives of youth leaders. In the story of Moses, Aaron, and Hur. The Jews prevailed against the Amakkites as long as Moses could hold up his arms. But he couldn’t keep them up all day, so Aaron and Hur walked with him and held his arms up (Exodus 17:10-12). Every youth leader needs an “Aaron and Hur club” around him _ this is war.

We cannot afford to have a ministry that is program - driven or idea driven or even goal driven. It must be a prayer - driven ministry, or we will

only see results humans can produce. In *Beyond the Obvious*, fervent focused prayer will give us what God can do for our young people. “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” (James 5:16)

A youth leader with the *Beyond the Obvious* burden will challenge the young people to be what they would like the church to become. Young people can catch a vision that says, “If it starts here, maybe it could spread throughout the church.”

Adventist young people need to realize their potential to be spiritual example for their church and beyond. They could be God’s instruments to lead the church into something more loving, more evangelistic, more exciting, more real than many adult believers are experiencing.

Ellen G White in her *Appeal to the young* found in testimonies, Vol 3, page 371, says: “If they would elevate their thoughts and words above the frivolous attractions of their world and make it their aim to glorify God, His peace, which passeth all understanding, would be theirs.” She also encourages in *Child Guidance*, page 557, “Our young people need to be helped, uplifted, and encouraged, but in the right manner; not, perhaps, as they would desire it, but in a way that will help them to have sanctified minds. They need good, sanctifying religion more than anything else.”

God has commissioned us as leaders to “pump up the volume” of Adventist Youth Ministry for the salvation of our youth! Let the message of salvation sound above the noise of the world through the Adventurer, Pathfinder and Senior Youth/Young Adult programs, resources, and leadership. Time is running out, we must move Beyond the Obvious to save our youth.