



IFCA YOUTHLINE

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Family Integrated Ministry



In our post-modern culture, the landscape of youth ministry seems to change quite often in our country and trends push and pull churches in many different directions. The IFCA Youth Council has seen many such changes in the recent decades and some of them have not been so healthy for our churches. This is why we have carefully crafted our youth ministry philosophy to be **“Encouraging and equipping students to serve in their local**

church TODAY.” This originated from a desire to be biblical in our approach to youth ministry with careful regard to the entire church body and not just growing a large numerical youth group. Our youth ministry philosophy was created from what the IFCA Youth Council saw to be vivid in the Scriptures. It is not a clever scheme derived from our culture, however I know that this philosophy is not the only philosophy that is “biblical.” The most important thrust in our thinking comes from the admonitions for the Church to be serving and growing together as an entire body, with no distinction between adults and teens. Ephesians chapter 4 gives us great challenge about what it means to use our unique giftedness in the “body” of Christ and this is a bedrock concept regarding our desire to involve teens in ministry, instead of just “doing ministry to them or for them.”

Over the past few years there has been another trend growing that is changing the landscape of youth ministry across our land. This trend is known as the “Family Integrated Ministry.” Its roots go back 20 years or more when the term “Family Based Youth Ministry” was starting to bud as an alternative to how churches were running their ministries. Today the movement is called the “Family Integrated Church.” I am being asked with more regularity about how IFCA fits into the family integration movement or if we are a part of that movement and so I think it is time to write on the subject and clarify a few things.

The Recent Past

For decades we have seen many churches gravitate to hype and entertainment in order to build large youth ministries in their churches. The goal was “numerical maturity,” pragmatism was the vehicle, and “relevance” was the selling point. The idea seemed to be, “we need to be relevant to the teens in order to reach them.” That “relevance”, however, was a disguise for just acting like a teen so that youth leaders would be “liked” or the numbers would continue to grow. At large, “relevance” has led youth ministry away from expository teaching, and towards topical jargon. But there was a shift mid-course that I like to call the “digging deeper trend” which came about because the shallowness of the teaching was not

keeping the teens that were attracted. Though this shift was a positive one, it has not been entirely effective since “digging deeper” was mainly based around being more relevant regarding how intense the application of the same topical studies could be. This has not translated into the teens developing good Bible study methods or embracing their role as a vital part of their church. For some it has translated into thinking they know a lot about the Bible (a sort of pride) because they thought hard about the Bible and some passages. In some cases this belief that they had gone deeper, has been unfounded due to a weak exegetical foundation and is hurting the Church in the long run. “Going deeper” in a text has at times been nothing more than the smoke and mirrors of intense application, instead of the intentional study of the Word in a systematic (“boring” / “non-relevant”) way.

Our answer

Out of this culture, we have constructed a philosophy of ministry that stands in opposition to numbers based success and the entertainment model of youth ministry. As we recognized the destructive nature of this model for the Church we began to ask the hard questions and craft two main goals we ought to pursue in biblical youth ministry. The two goals we emphasize are: *proper Bible study methods* and *effective mentoring toward service in the local church*. Because we believe that a literal grammatical and historical Bible Study method is essential to true and lasting



spiritual growth, we have been working hard at producing studies for churches to use that would help their teens learn how to study in Sunday school or youth group, as the teacher is teaching. Thus, they will be able to be an active member in the body of Christ having a theology that becomes their own much quicker than waiting for adulthood to embrace such things. We also feel it is important to give experience and mentoring opportunities to our teens while they are in our churches so that they become grafted into the local body using their unique gifts. We believe that “Serving Students Stay” because they are vested in the body and grow a genuine love for their church family as they serve. The idea of separating the teens to be a separate group entirely from the adults has never been our goal and is seen as a weakness of the popular model of the past two decades. **We believe that teens are not just the church of tomorrow; they are the church with us TODAY!**

The newest popular reaction

A growing response to the popular entertainment trend is to say that youth ministry is not biblical and that it needs to be replaced with a biblical model. The “replacement model” is called “family integrated ministry.” From what I have gathered from those who are speaking the loudest about this ministry model, family integration takes offense to the age segregation that church ministry has espoused for many decades. They hold to the view that age segregation is what is at the core of the Church’s demise in our current day and age. The idea being floated is that the segregation of ages is the leading factor in why teens are growing up and moving away from the Church. Their solution is to bring the families back together and keep them together so that fathers (specifically) can be the sole source of spiritual teaching and training in the lives of their children; this way strong families can mean a strong church.

Scott Brown has written a few books on this subject entitled: Weed in the Church: How a Culture of Age Segregation is Destroying the Younger Generation, and Fragmenting the Family and Harming the Church. In these books the principles are set forth that parents ought to be the only ones that teach their children. Adam McManus, another prominent author for the family integrated church movement, states that to “farm out” the responsibility of teaching our children to other people, is to ask others to ‘parent our children by proxy.’” McManus has cited the following Scriptures to document his contention that it's God's will for the Church to embrace the biblical model of families staying together in the service as the Word of God is preached: Deuteronomy 16:9-14, Joshua 8:34-35, Ezra 10:1, 2 Chronicles 20:13, Nehemiah 12:43 and Joel 2:15-16. There is much more that can be said in representation of this current trend in the Church today, but what has been shared seems to be more or less the backbone of the movement.

Our answer:

At first glance this seems to be a wonderful idea! Seeing the Church embrace the family and strengthen it! Who wouldn't be in favor of that? IFCA International is all about families being strengthened and providing strong foundations for the lives of our teens and the strength of our churches. On the surface I see great strength and profit in encouraging parents to take their God given responsibility to raise their children. This is a very biblical concept and worth saying “Amen!” to.

There are just a few cautions I would like to point out regarding where family integration leads. The problem is that when family integration becomes the official philosophy of a church, the father's are commissioned to be the spiritual leaders of their homes (this is a good thing) and no one else has the freedom to speak into their children's life at all. This is a departure from the way the Church was set up to be the institution in which God calls and commissions men to serve the body as “under-shepherds” and leaders. It is worth mentioning that most, if not all, of the Scriptures used to support the family integrated philosophy of ministry, come from the Old Testament; a period of time that was void of the institution God calls “the Church”; a time when the family was the only vehicle for spiritual training. When God established the Church in the New Testament He never gave instruction that families ought always to stay together, or that only fathers/parents can speak into the lives of their own children. In fact, we see quite the opposite. When Paul taught his understudy, Timothy, how to grow as a Christian he told him to be about the business of training others to do so as well (II Timothy 2:2). The mention of boundaries regarding the family unit are absent from the New Testament and that ought to help us see that we need to take a balanced approach to any firm conviction regarding the father's role as sole teacher. Our fellowship ought to always be about the business of encouraging parents to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4) since they are the ones that are ultimately responsible, yet the Church has a responsibility to come along side families and edify as well. We see roles in the family defined very clearly in Ephesians and I Peter yet those descriptions were never meant to be descriptions of the Church. Rather, they are descriptions of what a Christian family ought to look like.

The best way I can describe our youth ministry model is a “**family supporting**” **ministry**. While we would be very vocal about how important the family is in the Church and in our world, we do not officially embrace the family integrated church movement.



IFCA International is committed to biblical ministry consisting of encouraging and equipping teens to be an active part of their local Church today. This includes the crucial element of teaching teens how to study the Bible while we study it, and training/mentoring them in their service as a part of their church today. All of this is done with the idea in mind that we are supporting what our parents are teaching their teens on every other day of the week. These two thrusts of ministry were never meant to usurp authority from parents, or work against them. We must make sure in our churches that we never replace parents and their role; yet we cannot afford to neglect the teaching and training of our young people today. Whether a church decides to separate ages into groups or not is not a sin issue, it is a preference issue that each church will decide on their own. Our youth ministry philosophy, though, is one of partnership not separation. I feel it is somewhere in between the extremes of the Entertainment Model and the Family Integrated Model: In essence we are NEITHER.

Our website www.ifcayouth.com contains the foundation for youth ministry materials that are focused on helping our students not just to remain in our churches, but to begin to be an active part of our churches today and to be involved into the future. Please feel free to check out the way we teach teens how to exposit a book of the Bible (verse-by-verse) in our Bible study curriculum, and see what our regional and national events really are all about as we seek to build a healthy servant's attitude into all we do and to support the families and churches in our fellowship.

If you ever wish to chat about becoming more involved with us regionally (in your area) and nationally at our National Convention, please contact me via e-mail: travisyp@gmail.com . I would love to partner with you as we seek to encourage and equip students to take an active part in their local church today.

**ENCOURAGING AND EQUIPPING STUDENTS
FOR SERVICE IN THE LOCAL CHURCH**