

My Mom and Dad separated when I was eight, moved to different cities and later divorced. I moved with my Mom. Growing up, I didn't get a lot of opportunities to spend time with my Dad. For most of my life's pivotal, transitional moments or events, my Dad was not around. I either experienced those events on my own with little insight or wisdom from anyone or some "father-figure" who stood in for a time. That is true with the exception of when I was learning how to drive. I remember visiting my Dad when I had just received my learner's permit. One weekend afternoon, he took me out in his car and he let me drive. It was great! I remember I was really excited and my Dad was probably more than just a bit nervous. Over the course of the afternoon driving all around Mississauga (or at least the deserted industrial areas), my Dad taught me a couple of things that were ostensibly about driving, but I later realized that those driving lessons were important philosophical life and ministry lessons as well.

The first thing I remember him telling me was that *you can't drive faster than the car in front of you*. This might seem obvious to an experienced driver, but I can remember my enthusiasm when I first got behind the wheel. I wanted to go fast, certainly faster than my Dad was comfortable with me going. I was especially frustrated when I got behind a car that seemed to be going slower than it as supposed to. After a few minutes of tailgating, my Dad gave me the above advice. I got the point and backed off a bit.

The second piece of driving advice I took away with me that day was that *you should only back up as far as you have to*. I don't remember exactly what we were doing when my Dad first said those words. I might have driven down a dead end street and had to turn around or maybe I was trying to park. Whatever the reason, I was backing up and, because I had plenty of room, I went backwards a fair bit. Even though in that instance I had lots of clear space, my Dad told me that I should get in the habit of backing up only as far as I have to. I asked why. He said there could be something you can't see obstructing your path and, if you only take the space you need to back up, then you won't needlessly back into something you could have avoided. That little bit of advice has saved me from some nasty damage to my cars over the years.

Little did I know then that my dad's advice about driving would, years later, help shape the ministry philosophy of an outreach to at-risk youth in Meadowvale and beyond.

Philosophy of Ministry

Philosophy has been defined as thinking out loud in the presence of others. For our purposes, it is not only thinking, but also praying, feeling, speaking and doing. As Christians we are all called to minister to one another. So, a philosophy of ministry is an understanding, commitment and calling of who we are and why we are here that guides us to do what we are asked to do by God. It is the principles that guide our decision-making process. It is the forethought that has gone into all our planning for programs and activities. It shapes our thinking. It is the theology we develop which builds up who we are and supports our actions.

A philosophy of ministry is the foundation, framework, a map, the underpinnings, the why behind everything that we do. Philippians 1:9-11 reads, "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that

you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ -- to the glory and praise of God". Paul's prayer for the Philippians, in this passage, is describing the process necessary for each of us to discover and act out a ministry philosophy that will bring glory to God. Love, knowledge, depth of insight, discernment are all necessary elements in the development of a philosophy of ministry. Discerning what is best is discovering your ministry philosophy. If you become who God wants you to be and act accordingly you are pure and blameless and filled with the fruit of righteousness. That is a great image for someone who is becoming and doing what God wants – following their philosophy of ministry.

I believe a philosophy of ministry can be compared to a second language. Not everyone speaks a second language. In a similar way, some people don't have a philosophy of ministry. They are limited in their ability to communicate, especially when they move outside their own environment. Some people speak a second language but not very well. They have to do all their thinking in their first language, translate in their heads what they want to say and then say it. Just like some people who have some kind of philosophy around ministry, but they aren't sure what it is, can't articulate it and they can't explain their actions in light of it. Some people are fluently bilingual, so much so that you can't even tell it is their second language. Likewise, some people have a philosophy of ministry that is so integrated into who they are that everything they think say and do flows out of it.

Philosophy of ministry is more like the pointer of a compass than the arrow of a spinning game piece. Magnetic forces compel a compass to point north. It can always be relied on to indicate the true direction. The compass always gives you your direction no matter where you are or what you are doing. With a spinning arrow on a board game, everything is left to chance. How much force you or others exert onto the game piece partly determines the random outcome in any given situation. Your philosophy of ministry should guide you through the course of your life, not the other way around.

Leadership and the importance of a Philosophy of Ministry

In the book Making of a Leader, leadership expert Robert Clinton defines a leader in the context of biblical leadership as a person with God-given capacity and with God-given responsibility to influence a specific group of God's people towards God's purposes for the group. (p. 197) In order to be effective over a lifetime of ministry, a leader must develop a ministry philosophy as a guide for future ministry decisions and direction. A philosophy of ministry is developed from who the leader is (how they have been shaped by God), what the leader has learned formally and informally on his own and from others and from a wide range of ministry experiences all of which is held up to the light of Scripture. *You can have a philosophy of ministry without being a leader, but you can not be a leader without a philosophy of ministry.*

The Dam's Philosophy of Ministry

What I learned from my Dad is just a small part of the many experiences including learning from mentors, "on the job" training, academics and my own spiritual journey that make up who am I and the principles that guide me in ministry.

The identified principles then act as a guide for future ministry direction. Ministry philosophy can also be caught and taught to young leaders thus continuing the cycle and adding to the development of leadership. As co-founder and now executive director, this is my experience at The Dam Youth Drop-in. The philosophy of ministry at The Dam and my own are so closely entwined that I often have a hard time telling the two apart.

Leadership: grown from the inside out

Clinton emphasizes throughout his book that the development of a leader is from the inside out. He suggests that God first has to work in you before He can work through you. Many leaders desire to be used by God and, in their enthusiasm, they jump in past their depth. In their hurry they have stunted their potential, or worse, wasted their potential for ministry completely. God will not work through a leader until she is properly prepared. A master musician does not perform until he has finely tuned his well crafted instrument. How much more will God, the Master Musician, take time with us, His instruments, in preparation for ministry and on-going care for long-term ministry? You might say that a philosophy of ministry is the score of our life, the sheet music God performs through us when we are ready.

Purpose/Ministry Direction

I remember, while I was still working as an Outreach Worker with street youth at Yonge Street Mission's Evergreen, thinking *how much better would it be to reach youth at-risk in their source communities before they ever run away downtown and become homeless street kids*. Looking back, I can identify that moment as the birth of purpose and ministry direction for the work which I am now doing.

Research at the time indicated that 60% to 80% of homeless street youth came from the suburbs or small towns and were from middle-class or better homes. Most youth run away for "good reasons" such as fleeing abuse, but all of them get into even more trouble once they hit the streets of downtown Toronto. Research again indicated that once a youth has lived on the street for even a short period of time (up to a year), chances are they will never leave – they may die, be scarred for life (emotionally, physically, intellectually and/or spiritually) or get too caught up in drugs, prostitution or gangs to ever escape. We used to say that it takes six years for a street youth to trust an outreach worker enough to share with them what has happened to him or her since arriving on the street, let alone deal with it and then, and only then, can they begin to work through whatever forced the youth to the street in the first place.

How much better would it be...

"How much better would it be" thoughts and statements always speak to vision, purpose and ministry direction - a picture of a better future that can be shared and owned by others. Such a vision responds to the pain and hurt around us by providing hope for healing, restoration and even prevention. That picture then inspires others who share a compassion for hurting people and motivates them to action.

My personal ministry direction for my life and my life's work has been shaped and refined over the years by God and by my experiences sometimes by knocking off huge chunks and, at other times, by smoothing some rough edges. I have always known that I would be working with youth even from the time that I was a teen myself. God led me

through family and personal experiences that would help me to identify with and have compassion for the troubles of other youth later on. My educational training in social work and theology has always been bent toward an application to young people. My work experiences look like a spiraling path that narrows in to where God wants me - from university students to church youth and street youth to youth at-risk.

I co-founded the ministry of The Dam and, like it or not, much of my own passion and purpose is mixed into the cement that now forms the foundation of who we are and what we do. We started this ministry because we felt called to respond to the needs of youth in our "source community" – Mississauga, specifically Meadowvale and the surrounding area. We want to be a friend and a resource in the lives of youth in our community so that when they need someone to talk to and somewhere to go, they will know to come to The Dam and they will feel comfortable talking with one of our staff or volunteers. We want to be a positive Christian presence in their lives and help them to get the help they need when they need it.

The Dam is a *preventative program*. We are called 'The Dam' because it is our prayer that our ministry is a dam that stops the flow of youth from becoming homeless street kids in downtown Toronto. How much better would it be to build relationships with at risk youth, be available to them both emotionally and physically and be a positive presence in their lives while they are still living at home, still involved in school and still connected to the community so they never feel the need to run away to the streets and never have to experience the horrors street life.

Having a purpose plays a large role in the longevity of any ministry – personally and corporately. I believe that we can do nothing of lasting value without the vision and discernment that comes from God. I have heard that similar ministries to ours tend to last only three to five years before they falter and eventually die. There are many symptoms such as dried up funding, staff burn out or a negative reputation, but the underlying cause of such failure in ministry is usually lack of ministry direction. Failure to share the purpose usually leads to a similar end. Purpose gives direction for ministry. A wise mentor once told me, "You have no hope of getting there if you don't know where there is!" Without purpose, you do not have direction and, without direction, you have no idea whether or not you are successful in reaching your goals and objectives.

A personal or corporate ministry direction that does not grow with the ministry is often too rigid to last. My purpose in ministry has changed through my years at The Dam as I went from an outreach worker spending most of my time with youth to the director of drop-in taking on supervisory responsibilities to where I am now, as executive director, responsible for ministry direction, staff supervision and fundraising. It was a difficult transition to make. I couldn't understand why God was taking me away from working primarily with youth where He has gifted me and I find great enjoyment to a job which is primarily administrative and removed from the front line. It was one of my mentors who helped me realize that while it was good to have me on the front lines working with youth, *how much better would it be* to be in a position to enable ten to do the work that only I was doing before. That kind of reasoning inspired and motivated me to take the steps I needed to take to provide the foundation on which others can stand; to be the necessary support to ensure that many others can continue the work. Once again vision led to purpose which then gave rise to direction, direction set goals to be

achieved and thus the ministry of The Dam was able to grow and develop.

I don't know where I will be in ten years, twenty years or more. Will I still be at The Dam? God knows. What I do know is that God has given me a heart for youth, specifically unchurched youth at-risk, to bring them into relationship and community first on a human and outreach ministry level and then on to Jesus and His Church. Want to find me in ten or twenty years? I'll be the old guy in the middle of a bunch of youth trying to be the incarnational presence of Christ in their lives, whatever that means in that situation.

Ministry Structure

The Dam Youth Drop-in is a community program for youth ages 13 to 19. Our programs provide a positive, healthy, and encouraging environment that is drug-free and alcohol-free. The Dam is a safe place for all teens, however we specifically target youth who are considered to be youth-at-risk. At The Dam, youth can participate in different activities, relax, and get the help they need when they need it through informal counseling, referrals, and interaction with trained youth outreach workers and positive adult role models. The drop-in is named "The Dam" because we believe that the drop-in is a dam that stops the flow of teens from running away and becoming homeless street youth downtown. It is our goal to be the friends of youth and help them to stay at home, in school and in the community.

The Dam is a preventative ministry. It is the role of the staff and volunteers in our drop-in programs to be a friend and resource to youth to help youth stay at home, in school and in the community. During our transitional period we connect with youth through outreach, on-on-one mentoring and in drop-ins on Wednesday and Friday nights at the Meadowvale West Church Centre. Our other programs include "The Sunday Thing" on Saturday afternoons, recreational activities like floor hockey, monthly discussion forums on topics of concern to youth, life skills workshops, sports and small group programs in the schools, community outreach and opportunities for service in the community.

Other initiatives at The Dam:

- Our housing program gives youth who run away or are kicked out a place to stay with volunteer host families for emergency, short or long-term stays until we can help them work out their problems with their parents and go back home.
- Affinity is a program for pregnant teens & young moms. The young girls, pregnant teens and single moms of our community are in great need of the preventative, supportive and educational programs that Affinity has to offer through caring relationships, support groups and workshops.
- Our alternative education program help "hard to educate" students who did or would have dropped out to continue and/or complete their high school education. This program is possible because of a partnership between the Peel District School Board.
- Staff and volunteers work with youth who are looking for work, either part-time or full-time, not so much to help youth find jobs but more to help them keep them.

Ministry Values

Youth are worth it!

Where does your understanding of human value begin? This is an important question that will significantly affect your ministry philosophy. Do you derive your basic perception of people's worth from creation or from the fall? Through creation, we realize that we are all made with love and care by God in God's image (Genesis 1:27). We understand there is inherent worth in who we are; each one of us special, unique, good and valued by God and, therefore, also by us. If we take on an image of humanity from after the fall, we see ourselves (or, more specifically, the non-Christians with whom we are ministering) as sinful, ruined, unworthy of God's love and redemption and turned out by God and, therefore, also by us. With a "fall" mentality, at best your ministry philosophy devalues the people you are there to help and, at worst, it destroys their dignity.

I was brought up with a fall mentality understanding that humanity is basically evil and Christ's work on the cross redeems us. Then I started working at Yonge Street Mission under Mike Clarke, then Evergreen director and future co-founder of The Dam. He taught me to see people as God created them – good (Genesis 1:31) and to treat them with the respect and dignity deserving of creatures made in God's image. God's good creation is certainly tainted by original sin which separates us from God and we do need to be redeemed by Christ's sacrifice, but people who are not yet saved are not and should not be treated like dirt.

In Understanding Today's Youth Culture, Walt Mueller agrees with seeing children as God's gift. He writes, "It is a big mistake to think of our children as liabilities; they are a reward from God, given as a sign of God's favor. Because he values them so highly, so must we" (p. 6). At The Dam, we put where we stand on this issue right at the start of our mission statement – "We believe that the youth of our community are our most valuable treasures. They are made by God to possess inherent precious worth and dignity." We choose to see the good in people that God created in us rather than see the spoiled nature of original Sin. We have all fallen short of the Glory of God. In God's eyes, there are none worse and none better. We are all equally unworthy, but God would not have sacrificed His only son for nothing! We are all important and have value – God said so!

The importance of earnestly being

The most important human element of any philosophy of ministry, as far as I am concerned, is **relationships**. Doug Fields valued relationships so highly in his church's ministry philosophy that all their planned values are expressed using the word relationships as an acronym (p. 235). A focus on personal, one-on-one relationships should be at the core of any ministry to youth. Not just relationships with youth, but with God, others (church members, parents, friends, family, donors, volunteers...) and yourself. All these relationships and the developing of these relationships are crucial.

What makes a difference in youth? People do! One of the main problems of the social service industry is its focus on programs. If someone needs help with a problem, well, find a program for them! Funders give money to programs, but are reluctant to

fund the salaries for the staff to run the program. Many of us feel more comfortable and perhaps more justified when we are **doing** something, but what I am suggesting is that ultimately **being** is more important.

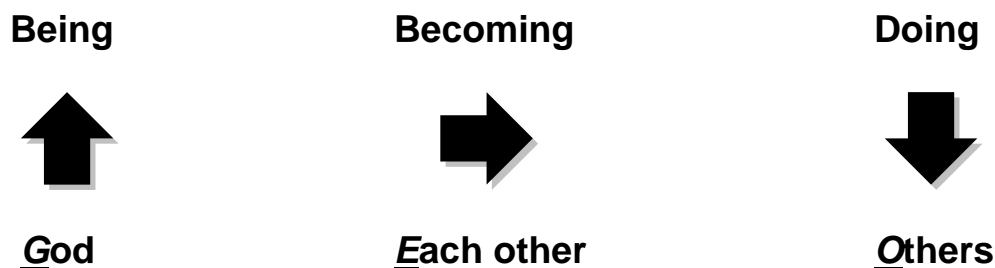
Programs don't work unless you have got the people to make them work. People who care about the youth with whom they are working. Compassionate people who have a heart for what they do and see the inherent value in the teens they are there to help. Programs come and go, but the youth who need help don't. They need a constant in their lives – a counselor, a mentor, a friend – someone who will come alongside them and be there when they need them. Someone who will meet them where they are and help them to take the steps they need along the way.

Being sincere, authentic, caring and compassionate is what leads to the development of intimate, real, long-term, caring relationships with youth that really make a difference in their lives.

Anyone can do good ministry, but great “ministry flows out of being”.

The difference between good ministry and great ministry is often the ministry leaders. Leaders can be technically proficient at the tasks of their work and so do their job well. But to be great, a leader needs to move beyond 'doing' to live and model 'being' as a model of ministry. Doing is the necessary part of ministry. Without 'doing', well, nothing would get done. But, being is the life giving part of ministry. Without 'being', there is no long-lasting benefit to the practical help provided.

A foundational understanding of The Dam's philosophy of ministry involves a study of the words: **Being, Becoming** and **Doing**. Being is about who we are in Christ. It is about understanding ourselves in relationship with our Creator. It is God's ministry to us. (1 Corinthians 12:3, 1 Peter 1:9-10 & Romans 12:1-2) Becoming is the process of building up the body of Christ and developing community. In Becoming, the attention is on one another, growing as part of a community. It is our ministry to each other. (1 Corinthians 12:4-31, John 17:13ff & Romans 12: 3-5) Doing is the part where you actually go out and do what needs to get done. Here the focus is on ministry to others. (2 Corinthians 5:12-20, John 17:13ff, Eph 4:11-12 & Acts 1:8)



Being is a prerequisite for Becoming. Becoming is a prerequisite for Doing. Doing provides feedback to Being or Becoming. Practical experience in ministry informs who we are both individually and corporately. Those weary with Doing (Galatians 6:9) return to Becoming for refocus/renewal or return all the way back to Being for transformation. Thusly, the process repeats itself. In this cycle we continually allow God to work on us, build one another in community and minister to those in need.

Taking the first letter from the main focus of each stage God, Each other and Others, we get "GEO". GEO is defined as of or relating to the Earth from the Greek "ge" meaning earth. Putting these three stages together (Being, Becoming, Doing) gives us our understanding of the world around us. Our "spiritual geology" (the study of our Christian worldview) is the mapping out of our relationship to God, to each other (including ourselves) and to others. We are to be...

- Grounded in theology, in understanding and in wisdom. (1 Corinthians 1:20-25, 1 Corinthians 2:10-15, Ephesians 1:4-10, Colossians 1:9, Colossians 2:2-7, Colossians 3:16&17, James 1:5 and James 3:13-18)
- Down to earth. If we are too heavenly minded, then we are of no earthly use. (The gifts of the Spirit, 1 Corinthians 12, and the fruits of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22)
- In the world, but not of the world. (2 Corinthians 2:10, James 4:4, 1 Peter 2:11&12, 1 John 2:15-17 and 1 John 5:1-5)

Making a difference

What makes a difference in the lives of youth? We conducted an informal survey of youth who came to the drop-in asking them why the drop-in was important to them. Their feedback was an incredible confirmation of what we believe is so important in ministry. The overwhelming response was relationships. They cited many examples of friendships with staff and or volunteers that meant a great deal to them and helped them a great deal in working through their problems. The second highest mentioned aspect of The Dam was the importance of community and a safe place. Youth appreciated and thanked staff for providing for them a safe place where they could go to meet friends and keep/stay or get out of trouble. Third highest aspect of our ministry that was mentioned by youth in the results was activities and events. Interestingly enough, it was not necessarily the activity or the event itself that was important, but that it provided the opportunity or the occasion for a significant experience or life change to take place.

People over Programs

As a ministry that highly values relationships, it is not surprising that we place an emphasis in our ministry philosophy for people rather than for programs. Programs are the vehicle or the mode that has been planned and designed as a good and appropriate way to facilitate the development of relationships or help someone dealing with a problem. It is surprising, even in the ministry philosophy context of The Dam, how quickly programs slip into "that's just what we do" and lose their relational design and purpose. If a program is no longer serving its purpose, no longer meeting the need it was designed for we should not be afraid to redesign or cancel it to put something that better meets the needs of those you are working with in its place.

You are to be as Christ to them

At The Dam, the staff and volunteers are encouraged *to be the incarnational presence of Christ in the lives of youth*. Just as Christ has ministered to us through His followers, we are now to do the same for others. This is an example of the ministry of being. Pete Ward, in his book God at the Mall, uses the phrase incarnational ministry "to denote the crossing of barriers to share the faith by being with a group of people" (p.19). Our prayer is to be His instrument, His vehicle for sharing Himself to others. Being an

incarnational presence is living a God-life among the community where God places us. It is carrying out the role of “God with us” or “God among us” in our ministry context just as Jesus Himself did. As Jesus was Immanuel, so we are to be “immanuels” to our family, community and in our ministry. Ward adds that “youth work which is incarnational will see the life of Jesus as a model for ministry” (p. 37).

The parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46) illustrates the idea that we, as the embodiment of Christ, take over His role until His return. We, as Christians, are supposed to respond to those in need as Jesus did. The previous parable about the talents (Matthew 25: 14-30) similarly tells the story of agents, the servants of the master, working on behalf of and in place of their lord until his return. We are Christ's agents in this world, set with the role of His ambassadors – to do His work in His place – until the Lord returns.

Real life changing impact comes not so much from well-designed programs, but rather the vitality of influence is best expressed as we live God among those around us. It is when we model the affections of Jesus, the conduct of Christ, and the sensitivities of the Spirit that we salt people's lives with a yearning for God.

They are to be as Christ to you

Not only do we try to be Christ in kid's lives, but we learn *to see the face of Christ in the faces of those with whom we are ministering*. “What you do for the least of these, you do for me” (Matthew 25:40). The “goats” of this parable are the ones who did not help the needy realizing too late that helping those in need is our service to Jesus. Reaching out to the poor and needy, the widows and orphans involves both being the Christ in us and serving the Christ in others. Being and doing. James writes “religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (1:27). The widows and orphans of our society are no longer just the poor living in the projects or homeless street kids downtown - they live in suburban and small town communities across the country. They are our neighbours and our friends – they are Christ waiting for us to serve Him. Our goal is to be a friend and resource for youth at-risk, the orphans and widows of our community, and to be a positive, Christian presence in their lives. Our act of worship which is pure and faultless before God is to care for the needs of those around us without getting stuck in the same mess ourselves.

And, finally, how what my dad taught me about driving affected my philosophy of ministry.

You can't drive faster than the car in front of you.

You actually can't drive faster than the car in front of you, so don't try – it only leads to accidents. Good driving advice, but an even better life and leadership lesson. As a younger leader, I was often frustrated that the leader in front of me (a mentor, a supervisor or an Inter-Varsity staff person) didn't go as fast as I wanted to go. My Dad's advice came in handy and I avoided a lot of front end collisions by being a little more patient. How many times as leaders do we “drive over” others in our enthusiasm over going in a certain ministry direction or putting together a great program? As a leader, I am aware that I need to stay in the flow of traffic so as not to lose those who are trying

to follow. I actually prefer to lead in the middle encouraging everyone around me in the same direction. So, often there are those I am leading that I have put in front. In the same way, I need to keep my speed in check so as to not run over those ahead of me.

You should only back up as far as you have to.

Something in our culture tells us that going backwards is bad. Sometimes the best direction to go in, to get out of a tight spot or a dead end, is backwards. We have to be able to discern when it is time to kill a program because it has died already or it is about to. We need to be able to go back to when something worked and start over from that point figuring out what went wrong so we don't just do it again. Following my Dad's advice about not backing up to far, I am careful in ministry situations to not go back any farther than we need to. One, I don't want to hit from behind issues we avoided as we went past them the first time. Two, I don't want to have to deal with the same issue repeatedly if I can help it. When that happens we end up covering ground we've already been over rather than being free to go in a new direction.

Don't wait to be out of gas before you fill up

The third bit of advice my dad gave me that, unbeknownst to him, not only changed my driving habits, but also my future ministry habits was *don't run on empty*. Even though he warned me, it took running out of a gas on the side of the road a couple of times before I realized the wisdom of not always playing chicken with the gas gauge. Likewise in ministry, it took a couple of times of near burn-out to realize that putting in was just as important as giving out. **You can't give what you don't have.** If you are not being continually refreshed and refilled emotionally and spiritually, you will run dry and have nothing of lasting value to give. At that point, you will burn out and either leave the ministry never to return or, even worse, you will stay in ministry never to make a lasting impact.

One of the first things that Mike Clarke talked to me about as a new staff at Evergreen was the importance of mentors. He said I needed an emotional mentor (who continually helps to unpack my baggage so that it doesn't pile up), a spiritual mentor (who reminds me that I am not Jesus and tells me to get down from the cross) and a peer mentor (who helps me to relax, wind down and re-energize). A year of intense ministry with street youth later and still without the proper mentors in my life, I was running on fumes. I remember the supervisory meeting where I broke down in front of Mike feeling like everything was sucked out of me and I had nothing left to give. The first thing he asked about was my mentors. I realized then the importance of mentors. I had to learn the hard way and so do many others, but it is a crucial lesson to learn if you want to be effective over the long-term.

Doug Fields describes perseverance as one of the nine components of a purpose driven youth ministry. By perseverance, Doug means doing what you have to do to take care of you. He cautions against burn-out and advises balance and boundaries, realistic expectations and control of your schedule as way to stay healthy (p. 314). He recommends many of the same things that we already have in place at The Dam such as mentors, accountable relationships, days off, job descriptions, solid block of vacation time and the importance of family to encourage health and longevity in ministry.

We shouldn't wait for exhaustion or spiritual dryness (our "empty" warning lights) before being refilled, but we should take advantage of every opportunity to fill up when we can. At The Dam, measures are in place to ensure the practice of this important preventative element. Each staff meets regularly with mentors as part of their job description, is given the option of a mental health day each month, is encouraged to pursue continued studies or professional development, is given extended vacation and has a home church. We do not want to continually burn out and replace staff – which neither honors the staff nor the youth with whom they are working. We want to develop leaders who are effective and alive in their faith and encourage longevity in ministry.

Difference between Training and Equipping

Teaching students what to do is training. Training develops their abilities. Teaching students how to be is equipping. Equipping develops them wholistically. Training develops a person's skill whereas equipping develops a person. Training teaches a task that solves a problem, but equipping teaches how to problem solve. Training keeps things happening, maintains existing ministries. Equipping makes things happen, initiates new ministry. Training perpetuates the present. What is happening will continue to happen as people are trained to keep doing it. Equipping makes for a more effective future. What happens changes to adapt to the changes facing the ministry into the future.

If training can be compared more to doing and equipping to being, then I would say that our goal was more to equip staff and volunteers in youth ministry than train them for youth ministry. I want to give them a solid base of understanding what is important for them and for the youth as they start thinking about getting involved in youth ministry. Teaching some fun activities gives them practical ideas for things to do at a youth event, but, for the most part, my focus is on helping them understand themselves, the youth they wanted to work with and what they have to offer in ministry. Armed with that foundation in ministry, the staff or volunteer can then continue their development on the go, with one of the many books on youth ministry or take a course. The next step would be to develop a strategy or plan based on their philosophy of ministry.

Ministry Strategy

As a Christian outreach ministry that did its homework, The Dam's response to the real needs of youth comes out of an in-depth exploration of not only the needs of youth generally in today's culture, but specifically in talking with the youth of our community. We did community assessments, interviewed school and church leaders and, most importantly, we surveyed the youth hanging out at the mall and in the parks. We found out what the perceived needs were such as boredom, problems dealing with parents, lack of activities, too much violence, alcohol and drugs, teen pregnancies, kids getting kicked out of home and having no place to go, students falling through the cracks of the education system, no jobs for youth among many others. So we started a drop-in to encourage a positive community; a safe place where teens could hang out and stay or get out of trouble. Affinity was launched to connect with young girls in the drop-in and be a support to pregnant teens and young moms. Our housing, alternative education and youth employment programs were developed to respond to the needs of

youth in crisis at home or in school or who needed to find work. But all these initiatives respond to the results of the underlying problems which youth face – the problems you can see as opposed to the real needs which cause them.

Know what's needed:

- Being (self-esteem – need to be valued)
- Belonging (family, community – need to be loved)
- Believing (faith, something more out there – need to believe)

What do youth who lack of these three basic building blocks suffer from? They lack joy, fulfillment and happiness in their lives. We developed an understanding of what was ultimately necessary as crucial “building blocks” in the lives of teens and realized an insufficiency in these exact areas in so many of the youth with whom we were working. For some youth, the people who were supposed to love them and care for them the most – their parents – were their abusers. Their sense of family was destroyed. For others, they were living the results of too many bad choices and were caught up in drugs, dropped out school, run away from home or all three and more. They cared little about themselves and less for others and had no hope.

In Understanding Today's Youth Culture, Walt Mueller discusses many of the areas of concern parents have with their teens from peer pressure and premarital sex to substance abuse and spiritual guidance. Much of Walt's advice to parents throughout the book to lead their son or daughter through the obstacles of the teen years is to pay attention to their needs and concerns (need to be valued), show them that they are loved and part of the family (need to be loved) and model a life of faith (need to believe). Walt's advice is designed to help parents build the building blocks in their teen's life.

Know what you have to offer:

- Jesus (Incarnational presence of Christ)
- Others (Authentic, Christian, healing, welcoming, safe community)
- Yourself (living faith, positive presence, offer of friendship)

What do Christians, because of Christ working in and through them, their authentic community and their willingness to make a difference, have to offer at-risk youth? J.O.Y. Jesus is, first and foremost, who we have to offer. As staff and volunteers, we are the link between Jesus and youth. We are the introducers. Youth see the Christ in us and are attracted by Him. They want to spend time with us and get to know us. Some may even ask us how or why we are different, joyful when most others they know are not. For some youth, just walking into the community of The Dam is healing enough to help them work out their problems. A psychiatrist once said of The Dam, “If there were more places like this, the world would need less guys like me!” Being part of a safe, healthy Christian community is incredibly powerful. Often youth need someone to talk to, a listening ear during a difficult time. We offer ourselves – our time, our friendship and that makes an impact with youth especially since many youth believe that adults don't have the time and don't care for them.

Bringing in (Learning) → Building up (Leading) → Blowing out (Leaving)

The staff at The Dam have developed a spiritual strategy which we are now in the process of implementing. It describes the ministry of The Dam in three parts: bringing in, building up and blowing out. This spiritual strategy is only possible within the context of a positive, healthy community. It is all about relationships. Its purpose is not so much the advancement of The Dam as it is the advancement of the Kingdom; however, it has practical elements in how it works itself out in the ministry of The Dam.

The first part is called “bringing in”. This is outreach in the community where we connect with youth where they are. This is the open door of a safe and welcoming drop-in program. It is the start of relationships. Visibility and accessibility are important. Greater visibility helps youth know that you exist and where you are. Greater accessibility or a low entrance threshold makes it easier for youth to take that first tentative step into The Dam’s community. This is the learning stage. Youth are learning about the ministry, about caring relationships with staff and volunteers and about what it means to be part of a positive, healthy, Christian community.

The second part of this spiritual strategy for The Dam is called “building up”. Youth in relationship and in community develop an interest and desire to take the next step. Second level programs like workshops, discussion forums and Bible studies fit in here to help youth develop their thinking, feelings and beliefs. Relationally, staff and volunteers move from the friendships with many youth (which characterizes bringing in) to more intentional, consistent, in-depth mentoring relationships with a few youth. Youth begin to make better life choices as their “building blocks” (self-esteem, sense of belonging and belief in God) become substantial and supportive elements of their lives. Youth begin to lead others from their own experiences; role modeling what they have learned to younger youth. Youth develop purpose in their lives, become disciples and develop their own philosophy of ministry as they begin to minister to others.

The third part is called “blowing out”. Realizing that there comes a time for youth to go is both difficult for the staff and for the youth. This is a healthy and necessary part of the process. It may mean that they go off to start a new chapter in their lives. They may become part of a new ministry or they may come back, but in a completely different way. Leaving is not an end, but a sending out, a commissioning to mentor others as they have been mentored, to initiate new ministries to help others as they have been helped and to start bringing in and building up others in Christian community.

The Emmaus Model of Ministry

The Emmaus Model of Youth Ministry seems to most closely fit the ministry model of The Dam. Extracting the principles behind the story from Jesus’ interaction with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) gives us a good model to follow in our own ministry with youth in our community.

1. **Youth workers begin relationally** – Jesus walked alongside the disciples on the road they were on. He didn’t drag them down His road. Youth leaders need *to come alongside* the youth they are working with and to take the time to understand what it is like to be them. The temptation is to re-direct them down a path where we are more comfortable, but we need to resist that initially. At The Dam, we actually teach

our staff and volunteers how to “come alongside” youth to meet them where they are and understand where they are at. Doug Fields writes that “many churches and youth ministries are relational by design because they realize that they earn the right to be heard by first caring for people” (p. 236).

2. **Youth workers learn where teens are at** – Jesus knew the answers, but He asked the questions anyway because He wanted to hear from them what their concern was. We should be so interested in the issues that are facing our youth today. We should be asking questions about music, media, alcohol, drugs, dating and all sorts of other stuff to hear from them what their concerns are even if we think we know the answers – especially if we think we know the answers.
3. **Youth workers respond to teens** – This is what most youth leaders want to get to first, but it is important for us to realize that Jesus first walked down their road, asked questions and listened to their answers before starting to teach. We should follow His example and walk, ask and listen first and then respond in the way that is most appropriate for each youth. We can “evangelize” youth when we first meet them – the truth is the Truth for everyone always. But, if we want to share the Gospel in a way that will impact their lives we need to hear first and respond creatively second.
4. **Youth workers help teens to reflect on issues, to think critically and formulate answers** – Jesus could have explained everything concerning Himself from the Scriptures right away, but He wanted to hear what they understood about what was going on around them. Jesus was concerned about their feelings and their problems. The answers that are handed to youth tend not to be fully valued or accepted. Dave Overholt cites research in his most recent book which indicates that while church attendance is down and respect for religious authority has dropped dramatically, youth are still seeking spiritual answers in large numbers (p. 33-36). It is better to help youth through a process of discovery where they develop the thirst and the skills to come up with their own answers. They are the same answers as you would have given them, but they now own them and accept them.
5. **Youth workers nurture relationships and celebrate them in community** – Youth ministry is about relationship. It can't be just about programs, but it is investing in people. It has to be about the youth and we need to be willing to spend the time with them to develop positive, healthy, long-term, caring relationships with them. In the midst of the horizontal concerns, Jesus pointed them vertically. I recognize this as role-modeling. I think there are some things that are best taught by letting others see you do it like treating others with respect and worship. This makes the intangibles a lot easier to understand because they can see practical examples of our faith.
6. **Youth workers send disciples out for ministry** – The principle here is to know when to let go. If Jesus can let them go when they are ready, then we need to be able to do that as well. We need to “equip them for independence” and then let them take their next steps on their own or with the help of someone else.

Lastly, just as the disciples did not recognize Christ at first, the youth don't recognize Christ in us in the beginning. In our relationships with teens we “bring them in” by walking alongside youth getting to know them and where they are at. We “build them up” by responding to their needs and helping them come up with the answers in

their own time. At some point, as we continue to nurture and develop our relationship and include them in our worship, they recognize the Christ in us and we can introduce them to a personal and direct relationship with Him. We “blow them out” by commissioning them to be, in turn, Christ in the lives of others.

Roles

There are a number of different groups or stakeholders at The Dam that play different roles which all together make up the whole of what The Dam is. On a human level, these roles are the Board of Directors, the staff, the volunteers, the youth and the community.

The Board of Directors is a group of volunteers who have made the commitment and taken on the responsibility of overseeing ministry direction and supervision of the senior staff. The staff and volunteers are the ministry's most valuable resources. As a relational outreach ministry to at-risk youth, people, the right people, are an essential and required element of ministry. Without the gifted, skilled, caring people to be in relationship with youth, run programs and essentially be that positive Christian presence in the community, The Dam would not exist. You can not overestimate the role volunteers have in ministry, although too often they are under valued and not fully appreciated nor utilized. Volunteers at The Dam give of their time and energy because they have a heart for youth and want to help.

If it was not for the youth and their need there would be no reason for The Dam to exist. The need to help youth with the often insurmountable problems they face in today's culture and in today's family system is evident almost everywhere you look. Their need for Christ in their lives is often far from obvious for them, but, more often than not, painfully obvious for us. In a world where youth have no voice and no protection from themselves or others, providing a safe place where someone is willing to listen is important.

All the above people along with parents, school teachers, politicians, church members and their leaders, business people and many others make up the community. Building a positive reputation in the community is crucial. In our experience, potential crises were averted because someone in the community – a parent, a church leader, a police officer or a politician – stood up for us and made the problem go away. Much of what we have been able to accomplish has happened with support from the community.

Jesus plays the most important role of all. He is the reason we are all here. He has changed the lives of the staff and volunteers giving us His heart for the broken seeking youth of Mississauga. He is ready to change the lives of youth who accept Him as their Saviour and Lord. In fact, He doesn't wait. The Spirit is working in their lives day by day bringing them closer and closer to a relationship with God. He is in us as we serve the youth and He is in the youth as we serve Christ by serving them.

Paul, Barnabas and Timothy

Essentially, I believe there are three roles in Christian ministry and they can be found in the Biblical characters of Paul, Barnabas and Timothy. We need to have at least one “Paul”, one “Barnabas” and one “Timothy” in our lives. We all need a mentor/teacher, an encourager/fellow worker and a disciple who is learning from us. Not

only do we need at least one of each of these types of people in our lives, but we need to realize that for everyone around us – we are one of these types of people in their lives. These roles are played out at The Dam. For some, I am Paul. I am the leader, the visionary, the role model, the teacher and the mentor for staff, volunteers, youth and the community. For others, I am Barnabas. I am a facilitator, encourager, fellow worker and friend for staff, peer mentors, some local pastors and fellow ministry leaders. And for others, I am Timothy. I am a learner, a disciple, a protégé to the Board, my mentors and in my academic studies. Everyone plays out each of these roles with different people in different ways.

Conclusion

Youth ministry is not something you do. It is something you live.

A philosophy of ministry is not a part-time job, not even a full-time job, but is a life-time job. Theory is important, but learning from someone who is living it and doing it is crucial. You can tell someone what to do and they might be able to go off and do it, but to show someone so that they can learn from your example is much more powerful and long lasting. I believe philosophy of ministry needs to be caught as well as taught. The power of emulation is such that you can tell me about skiing all you want, but I am not going to truly learn how to ski until you show me and I do it by your side. On the negative side, no matter how many books on parenting we read we still catch ourselves doing the things we hated when our parents did them to us

Someone once said that sincerity is the most important quality in relating to people – once you can fake that you've got it made! Ministry can't be an act. If you are performing the role of "Youth Leader", you may fool others but you will not "fake out" the youth. Youth will see through those who act the job and there will never be a truly relational connection formed. Being a youth minister is to be sincere in your faith and in your calling and when you see God working, be a part of it.

To have a philosophy of ministry is to have life, to not have one is to not have life

I don't mean to be irreverent by suggesting a philosophy of ministry can take the place of the Son of God in my subversion of 1 John 5:12. I simply want to get across the idea that a philosophy of ministry is the difference between a vibrant, lively long-term ministry and a frustrating, life-draining, short-term ministry. Working with youth without a philosophy of ministry can be done for short periods but you will have no foundation, no source of strength beyond your own, no opportunity and no sincerity. Just as not speaking a second language can limit your ability to communicate with other people as you travel around the world, not having an articulated, living philosophy of ministry severely limits your effectiveness and longevity. Some of the by-products of having no philosophy of ministry include burn-out, lack of vision, depression, separation from God and others, and loneliness. Some of the by-products of having a philosophy of ministry include connectedness, stability, longevity, the ability to inspire others and the experience of changed lives including your own.

Developing a philosophy of ministry encourages us to search out a theology of why we do what we do and, therefore, brings us closer to God. It encourages us to search inside ourselves to better understand and develop who we are and what

compels us to be in ministry. It enables us to take opportunities to develop relationships with youth which transcend activities to become meaningful life-changing friendships that feed both the youth and the leader. A philosophy of ministry gives us a solid foundation on which to build a ministry that can truly make a difference in the lives of those in need.

With a philosophy of ministry guiding our thoughts, feelings, planning, actions and words, we are more likely to be open to learn from others including youth, confident in our gifts and abilities, have integrity in our personal and professional life, be flexible in ministry but unbreakable in our theology, or, in other words, what may be descriptive of my own philosophy of ministry – to be solid at the core and fuzzy at the edges.

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