



Youth Group: The Enigma Unveiled

Youth ministers around the globe always talk about and pray for the same problems at conferences and youth gatherings. There are a range of often overwhelming social, physical, and spiritual needs that youth pastors minister to (drugs, alcohol, suicide, depression, bullying, eating disorders, lying, anger, doubt, despair, divorce, abuse, etc.) All of these topics have whole books dedicated to them, and will perhaps be the topic of another article, but today I wanted to focus on what I like to refer to as the “Ninja Ministry.” It is a ministry that formally meets on Friday and Sunday nights from 6-8 pm, but that also takes place on an individual level all week long, sometimes at odd hours of the day. It is a ministry that, like a ninja, is right in front of you, but you don’t realize it is there. Unless you are a parent who has generously volunteered to provide a meal for one of our youth functions (and I wholeheartedly thank you!) you may not know what actually happens at any given youth group meeting. I wanted to write this article to unveil the enigma and describe to you the ministry behind the mask of the ninja.

Our Jr. High students meet on Friday nights from 6-8 pm, and Sr. High students meet from 6-8 pm on Sunday nights. I’d like to walk you through an “average” night at youth group, if there is such a thing when you are working with adolescence!

Before the kids arrive, I gather the volunteer leaders, Polly Dickson (who has volunteered for over 10 years,) Will Hefner (a former youth group student who is in college at CofC) Micah Norton (a former youth group student who attends CofC,) and John and Sarah Katherine Gottshalk (a husband and wife, John attend youth group here from 6-12 grade) for prayer and fellowship to prepare spiritually for the night. We ask for God’s blessings, we pray for protection from the Evil One, and pray that the Holy Spirit would open the hearts and minds of the youth so that the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ can reach and heal them.

From the time the kids arrive until they leave they are surrounded by Christ. Jesus is in all that we do and it is because of this Christ-centered theology that this youth group has been blessed for many years. When the kids arrive, we open the doors with joy, eager to see them and share a wonderful night of fellowship with them. We have an awesome youth room on the second floor of the parish hall that provides a social setting to let the kids unwind and be kids for a brief spell. If you have never seen it, please stop by and check it out! The writing is on the wall! They play pool, foosball, video games, etc. and socialize for twenty minutes. Then we move up to the big room of the parish hall for worship.

We open with a welcome in which the kids pat their neighbor on their backs and tell them 4 essential Christian truths. To the neighbor on the left (God is love,) to the neighbor on the right (Christ's peace passes understanding,) to the neighbor behind them (You are fearfully and wonderfully made in the image and likeness of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God eternal. Amen) to the neighbor in front of them they shout (You are more than a conquer in Christ Jesus our Lord!) This brief time of affirmation is a crucial time of healing and ministry. We have an opening prayer and then we pray the collect for that week according to the liturgical calendar. We then gather an offering that is donated to Water Missions International, and then a student reads the scripture that we will be studying that night. Once the Gospel is read, I walk the kids through the text and share a teaching with them. After our lesson, we break into small groups and talk about the scripture and how we can apply it to our daily walk with Jesus. Then we focus in on prayer. We ask the kids to say one thing they are thankful for and one thing that they need prayer for. They pray for their schools, their families and friends, and for the world to receive the Gospel.

Once our small groups wrap up, we play a group game to relax and have fun together. All the while, the aromas of the kitchen have been spilling out into the parish hall. Our dedicated families prepare meals for our youth every Friday and Sunday night. As the game concludes, we gather around a long table for a home cooked meal as one very large extended family in Christ! We eat, laugh, and rejoice in God for His many blessings.

At eight o'clock I grab the bullhorn and repeat a saying that the kids have memorized- "You don't have to go home, but you can't stay here. Remember, don't always do what you feel and keep both feet on the wheel. I love you, but God loves you more. I hope to see you next week at the front door!" Then the ninja appears and silently walks them to the street where their parents pick them up.

St. Philippians, please encourage your kids to come to youth group, and to invite a friend; the Gospel is meant to be shared. The ninja is there every Friday and Sunday night, are you? Do you see the Ninja with his mask off? He has a beard and is smiling because the youth of this church and of this generation are receiving the Gospel of Grace!

Please pray for the youth of this generation to love and respond to Jesus, and to be spiritually hungry for the things of God. Pray for the youth pastor and the volunteer leaders, and for all the clergy at this church, in this diocese, and in the world. They have an often thankless job. Please encourage you priests next time you see them! Love one another as Jesus Christ has first loved us.

In Christ,

David "*The Ninja Minister*" Gilbert

