

## *The Story of Starting a Young Adult Ministry*

*by Scott Kramer*

Eight years ago, shortly after my wife and I were married, we felt a strong urging from the Lord to start a new ministry in our church here in the Northeast. I had been previously teaching a College & Career Sunday School class for a few years, and it had marginal success at best. We averaged between 8-10 students, mainly over the summer, and our attendance would drop significantly during the school year as students left the area for their respective universities. My wife had been involved in a similarly small ministry to young adults in her previous church in a different area of our region. When our lives became one in marriage, we remember attending our church of 1500+ and looking around the sanctuary on Sunday mornings seeing hundreds of young adults our age who were not connected in any way beyond Sunday AM Worship attendance. This bothered us, to say the least. It was through this weekly observation that the Lord burdened us to change the scope of the College and Career class to include a much broader range of people. We did some research and talked with some experienced leaders and decided to launch a new ministry in our church, a 'Young Adult Ministry.' This new ministry would be open to anyone between the ages of 18-35, married or single. We soon asked our Senior Pastor for permission, which he granted excitedly, and so we began.

At the start, our efforts were focused solely on reaching the YAs already attending our church and connecting them with one another. We made an announcement to the entire church body one Sunday morning inviting all YAs to join us for a movie night at our house. That Friday night we had about 15 YAs in our living room watching a movie and enjoying some good fellowship.

Following the Movie Night, we had decided to hold a once-a-month Bible study in our townhouse living room on Tuesday nights, as well. After several months we realized that once-a-month was not enough to maintain any consistency whatsoever in building meaningful relationships with these YAs. We soon upped the ante to twice-a-month. While this Bible study was meeting on a regular basis, we were simultaneously planning Social Events in which to provide a place for these newly connected YAs to hang out and enjoy relational time together. Our goal was to help them build relationships that would eventually become spiritually edifying. They did not know our ulterior motive, nor did they need to. All they wanted were friendships, and so did we (Many call this a 'relational ministry' model today). So we held monthly game nights at our house, went mini-golfing, hiking, and whatever else the YAs were interested in doing. We even took weekend paintball trips to Skirmish, USA to shoot at each other, in love, of course.

After about a year of Bible Studies and fellowship, our living room Bible study became more consistently attended. We were meeting every week now, and we had almost 20 YAs committed to the group. We had also formed a 'Volunteer Leadership Team' and were planning the ministry together.

Soon we came to an important crossroads in this new ministry. With our living room at capacity, we realized that we had to do something about this growing group. Under the conviction that it would be a good idea to change our then coed group into two separate same-sex groups, my wife and I introduced the idea to the group. Uh-oh! We quickly learned the lesson that even YAs in our emergent culture today are resistant to change. Why? It's simple. These YAs had built some very significant relationships with one another, and for us to even suggest the idea that they would no longer be seeing each other every week quickly placed us atop their hate mail list. But we persisted, believing that life sharing and life change would happen much better in uni-sex groups. So we took a vote and a slight majority agreed to divide the group along gender lines. After only a few weeks, both sides of the camp were very content with the change. In fact, many were grateful and found it much more comfortable sharing their lives with the group in a setting where they didn't have to worry about impressing the opposite sex in the room (not that YAs would care about that, right!?!?).

This is where our ministry started to gain momentum. With two Small Groups now meeting in two different homes, we had more YAs involved and excited about this new ministry. And many of these YAs were starting to do what my wife and I did on a typical Sunday morning: tackle, I mean, chase down other YAs in our church parking lot to invite them to join us! Isn't that what all young adult ministries have to do to start? So we and the other YAs involved continued to invite the un-connected YAs in our church to our Social events and Small Groups. Our ministry continued this way for several years. We eventually added two new Small Groups as each of the other groups grew too large to meet in one living room.

By the year 2003, we were well connected with over 75 YAs in our church, with over 150 on a mailing list. This is the point (summer of '03) at which we felt another one of those 'Divine tugs' at our hearts. We felt the Lord leading us to take a huge step of faith and begin a YA Worship Service. What?!?! We were just volunteers! Lay leaders in our church! Why would God do that? We were overwhelmed; but the prompting persisted, and we eventually obeyed. We presented the idea to our YAs, and there was large agreement. We would start a worship service for YAs in September!! This was a huge step of faith, particularly for me, as I was not a trained public speaker or pastor or anything, yet I knew that the main responsibility of teaching would be on my shoulders.

In September 2003 we launched our Friday Night Worship Service for YAs, still mostly from our own church. Here's where it becomes interesting. What we soon discovered was that there were not many churches in our area that offered any kind of ministry to YAs in this age group (18-30 something). So as we held our Worship services, we found that many YAs from other churches began to investigate our ministry. This was exciting because it was not only a place for our YAs to invite their friends but also because it was unifying the Body of Christ. This has continued to be a strong trend in our ministry; almost half of our core Worship Service attendees are YAs from other churches. Isn't that awesome! We never pressure anyone to change 'home' churches to join ours. It is simply our goal to help provide for them what their typically smaller churches cannot: a community of young adults with which to associate and grow in the Lord. We

encourage them to stay planted in their home churches and even start similar ministries there.

Our vision is simple: Helping young adults experience the love of Jesus Christ and grow in a relationship with Him. Our ministry has been influencing the lives of YAs since that time. We have averaged anywhere from 50 – 80 YAs in our Worship experience over the past 5 years, and have seen over 500 visitors! We anticipate touching many more lives for Christ in the years to come.

### **Recapping the Steps We Took:**

- Cast the vision for a YA Ministry to Sr. Pastor for approval
- Launch YA Ministry by introducing to entire church body via pulpit announcement. This should include a specific invitation to a planned event as a first connecting point. Leaders should be available that day in the foyer to answer questions and to meet YAs.
- Focus your efforts first on connecting the 'already attending' YAs of your church together in relationship and community. After you have developed a core of YAs, you can then begin to think about reaching YAs outside the church. This may take a few years.
- After the first 'Launch' Event, have planned some type of 'comeback' event or a spiritual growth opportunity like a bible study, so that the YAs know what the next step is.
- Continue planning opportunities for YAs to grow in relationship with one another. YAs are very relational and crave community, so you must help them make those connections.
- Be extremely pro-active in introducing yourself to any/all YAs you can find in the church. Make yourself known and invite them to join you at the next planned event.
- The beginning foundation of a YA Ministry should have (at least) these two components: social opportunities and spiritual growth opportunities. Plan (at least) monthly social/relational opportunities while at the same time planning (at least) monthly (or bi-monthly/weekly) Small Group nights for YAs to get together to talk about their faith and grow in the Lord.
- Build a leadership core/team who will share ownership of the vision and responsibility of this new ministry. Hand select capable YAs to help you in this ministry. You cannot do this alone!!
- Pray a lot!!

### **Notes:**

**I'll attach your current ministry video with this story so people can see where you are now.**

