

Defining Moments

Volume 72—Developing Contagious Students

WITHOUT THE HOPE OF JESUS CHRIST infused into the next generation, our world will only grow darker. Because student ministries represent that next generation (and so eventually *become* our church), it is essential that we invest our time and resources to reach them.

THE 93 PERCENT ADVANTAGE

According to George Barna, 93 percent of the decisions made for Christ occur before the age of 19. Given that statistic, a ripe harvest awaits student ministry leaders.

MORE THAN JUST A SAFE PLACE

Student ministries are more than a means of keeping church kids out of trouble. They provide the opportunity for students to be empowered to reach their friends, family, and community for Christ.

In addition, something happens in the hearts of adult Christians when they see young people blossom and take their first steps of faith. When the Holy Spirit changes a student's life, that student's entire family may be transformed as well.

NO LONE RANGERS

Students can face many obstacles when trying to present the Gospel to their friends. They may fear being rejected or misunderstood. Therefore, it is essential to support students throughout the entire process of relational evangelism. Students need leaders or peers who will:

- ask them to name people with whom they can take intentional evangelistic steps,

- challenge them to “walk their talk” so that their desire to honor God becomes apparent to others,
- pray with them for the Holy Spirit’s guidance regarding timing and opportunities.

STEPS FOR STUDENT MINISTRY LEADERS

Below are four steps that student ministry leaders can follow to train students in evangelism.

1. **Teach students to be intentional.** Each student has a circle of influence designed by God. Help your students become aware of the people in their lives with whom they can share the Gospel.
2. **Encourage students to build “integrity friendships.”** It takes courage to live with integrity—and to admit when you have made decisions that do not honor God. Help students experience and model the freedom and grace that comes when one has received forgiveness of sins through Christ Jesus.
3. **Prepare students to tell their stories.** Every individual’s story is significant and can be used by God. Equip students to explain to their friends—in three minutes or less—how Christ has made a difference in their lives.
4. **Sponsor seeker events for your students.** Students need events to which they can take their friends. An event can be as simple as attending a movie or a basketball game with a group of Christians, or as elaborate as a multimedia event hosted by your church.

INVOLVE STUDENTS IN THE EVENT PLANNING AND EVALUATION PROCESSES

Create a culture within your student ministries that is receptive to evaluation. Before you plan an event, recruit key students to help you. Students can offer valuable guidance if involved early in the planning process. Let them know that you need their ideas and prayers.

Once an event is over, solicit feedback from your students. Ask what worked, what did not work, and what can be done differently in the future?

A READY HARVEST

Students deserve our encouragement and training as they seek to reach out to lost friends and family members. As you consider the students in your own church, prayerfully reflect on the following questions:

- How purposeful has your church been in clearly presenting the Gospel to students as well as adults?
- Have the youth ministries within your church taken seriously the evangelistic efforts among students to their peers?
- What further steps can your leadership team take to challenge students to share Christ?

Remember the prodigal. Do not be discouraged if some of your students seem to wander far from Christ after graduating high school. These students often return years later thankful for the biblical foundation they received within your ministry.

Volume 72—Developing Contagious Students

Page 4



There is incredible potential waiting to be realized within your student ministries. If you have not done so already, plan a strategy for evangelism *through* students as well as *to* students.

“Do you not say, ‘Four months more and then the harvest?’
I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields!
They are ripe for harvest.”

John 4:35

© 2000 Willow Creek Association

Nancy Beach is the programming director and a teaching pastor at Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois. She was part of the original youth group that founded the church, and she joined the staff in 1985 to oversee all aspects of music, drama, dance, photography, production, video, and design.

Bill Hybels is the founder and senior pastor of Willow Creek Community Church. He is the author of many books, including *The God You're Looking For*, *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, *Fit to be Tied*, *Rediscovering Church*, *Making Life Work*, and *Leadership By the Book*.

Russ Robinson is the Director of Ministries and Small Groups and serves on the Management Team at Willow Creek Community Church. He provides leadership for the 200 staff who oversee more than 2,500 small groups. Prior to his staff role, Russ served on Willow Creek's Elder Board for four years. He is also an attorney and started his own law firm in 1989.

Bo Boshers is the Vice President of Student Ministries in the Willow Creek Association. For almost a decade Bo was the Director of Student Impact where he led an outreach of over 1,000 students at the high school ministry of Willow Creek Community Church. Bo is the author of *Student Ministry for the 21st Century*, *Student Impact Small Group Resources*, and *Impact Sports; Creative Competition for Team Building* (all published by Zondervan Publishing).