

# ***EPIC***

## ***mission, vision, values, & philosophy of ministry***

### ***MISSION***

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.  
Matthew 28:19-20a

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:8.

### ***VISION***

Our desire is to be a place where every teenager who walks in our door is welcomed by the love of God that is lived out in the lives we live and the love we convey. It is our hope that as students encounter God's love in real, tangible ways that that love would infiltrate every part of who they are resulting in supernatural change that sends them back into the world as passionate followers of Jesus.

As a reflection of their commitments, we expect to see this evidence:

- Intimacy with God
- Dependency on God
- Obedience to God
- The visible growth in the fruit of the Spirit
- Actively hearing God's voice
- Living from the heart

## ***COMMITMENTS (The main & the plain)***

### **WORSHIP**

The heavens declare the glory of God and we seek to join in this chorus for we know if we don't the rocks will scream out in our place. Through gathering together in song and heart for corporate worship and through the lived out praise of our lives in the everyday ordinary, we believe worship should resound from every fiber of our beings in every place we may find ourselves and in every moment we are given.

### **SERVICE**

As Jesus' church we are His hands and feet to this world. We are called by Jesus to serve both inside and outside the walls of the church believing with all our hearts that both should impact the other. Our desire is to see students so impassioned by the love of God that they see no greater life to be lived but a life lived out in the love of Christ. Students will not come to see the walls of the church as the limits of such love, but rather the origins of; the REVOLUTION from which Christian love should burst forth into the world.

### **OUTREACH**

Outreach isn't just something we do; it is the essence of who we are as Christians. It isn't optional or something we can look at on a day to day basis in terms of whether or not we will do it. As Christians we are called to seek the lost. As a shepherd would seek out his lost sheep or a woman tearing through her home for her lost coin, we are to move unafraid through this world seeking the one. We will do whatever it takes and suffer any cost in their pursuit. It is our desire never to stand before Jesus and hear of what we did not do for Him because we did not do it for the ones before us now. There is an unreal power in God's love; it is an unfathomable weapon with life changing capabilities and we seek to pursue people with this same love that pursued us, overcame our fears and doubts, and set us free to live as followers of Jesus.

### **COMMUNITY**

At the heart of humanity is the need for community. It is God-wired into our very nature. As people, we long for acceptance and knowing this, we choose to be a community that recognizes this deep need for belonging by accepting people just as they are. We refuse to be conditional in our community because Jesus left us with no other alternative. He loved those the world deemed unlovable and called the friendless and those cast off by society His friends. In the context of this kind of community, a community of acceptance, love, grace, and forgiveness, the love of God cannot help but be seen, felt, experienced, and received.

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## **TRANSFORMATION/SPRITUAL FORMATION**

Discipleship, being transformed and molded into the likeness of Christ is at the heart of who we are. We take serious Jesus' call to literally follow Him even today. We believe this transformation is more than simply head knowledge (after all, the book of James tells us that even the demons believe in God and they tremble in their knowledge). We believe this transformation occurs in the context of relationship with God today through the power of the Holy Spirit. As students are challenged to know Jesus personally, through the exercise of spiritual disciplines, learning to listen to God's voice, and the sharpening of community, a faith is yielded that is personal, real, authentic and dangerous and demonstrated by the emergence of the fruit of the spirit in their lives. We aren't challenging students to simply know about God, we challenge students to know God personally and relationally and to risk everything to follow Him.

## ***VALUES (Guiding Principles)***

### **LISTENING**

Listening is at the heart of communication and we desire to be in conversation both with God and humanity. So we listen on two levels: the spiritual and the natural. Spiritually we listen for the whisper of God's voice in our lives; we listen for His promptings, direction, guidance, conviction and encouragement. At the same time we listen to the voice of humanity both on the individual and global levels. If in the needs of people we meet (or ignore) the needs of Jesus, then in their voices we hear His. There is a conversation happening in this generation and in order to join in and speak into it, we feel we must be actively listening to what they are saying.

### **GRACE**

Grace: the underserved favor of God. Undeserved blessing. Undeserved forgiveness. Undeserved love. Grace. As recipients of God's grace, we see ourselves thus as givers of grace. By grace we are received by God and in grace we will receive others. This is not simple expressions of tolerance or the turning of blind eyes; it is the recognition that God's love is unconditional and so too shall ours. We will not wait to show and offer love but we will be lovers who refuse to wait.

### **EXCELLENCE**

God is the Supreme Creator and does all things great. In our worship to Him, we commit ourselves to the details and making the things that are good great. If it is God's, then it really should be the best.

## **RELEVANCE**

We value relevance, but we don't understand relevance as a cutesy thing that we wear to make the Gospel more attractive and palatable to an unbelieving world. We view relevance as a means of connection. As missionaries to a generation, we dwell in their space; we speak their language; we address their most pressing needs and questions; and we even taste their pain.

In our doing so, we reflect the relevant ministry of Christ. No matter what the audience, Jesus continually conveyed the message in their terms and on their turf. We realize that we can do ministry like Jesus, but it will require risk and even loss. We simply can't seek impact without involvement, and we release the grip on status, reputation, and comfort.

John described Jesus as "The Word [that] became flesh and dwelt among us." The term "dwelt" literally means "to pitch a tent." Jesus was not a commuter coming in from out of town for once-a-week ministry. He set up camp, pitched His tent smack dab in the middle of the people He desired to reach.

Parables – His primary means of communication – parables (literally "para" {near} "ballo" {to bring} "near bringing) – brought the high and lofty Kingdom of God into the dust and grime of a familiar life.

Rather than discuss the Kingdom of God or the Gospel in words or phrases familiar to us, we work with great diligence to connect them in meaningful ways.

We adopt their customs and symbols so that by honoring the things that they value, we convey that we respect them and that we desire to come near and connect. We become incarnational.

We understand the costs of relevance are high because they were for Jesus. He entered homes and shared meals with tax collectors, prostitutes, and others of ill repute, and religious leaders derided Him as a "friend of sinners." They slapped Him with labels of "drunkard" and "glutton." Even Jesus' own disciples were sometimes taken aback, like the time they found Him at the town watering hole outside a Samaritan village, locked in a conversation with a woman of dubious reputation.

Regardless of the risks, this was Jesus' way – "making Himself nothing and taking on the very nature of a servant" and "becoming obedient."

We risk, go to inconvenient places, and “be all things to all men” for the sake of the Gospel.

## **AUTHENTICITY**

The simple reason why celebrities like Eminem, Paris Hilton, and the like have risen and maintained their popularity is because they are painfully transparent. They may be controversial, but this generation responds to them with adoration because they don't gloss over their flaws and this generation respects that kind of authenticity.

We understand that this generation has had it with leaders, teachers, pastors, parents, etc. that speak of a life that ought to be lived without sharing (the key word “sharing”) their struggles. Most of the older generation has simply been written off as inauthentic.

Community. Communication. Compassion. Since the basic block of ministry is relationship, we find these 3 things essential. The Latin term “com” means “to share together” or “to make common.” And like Jesus, we desire to share the sufferings and struggles of this generation. Admitting our mistakes, prejudices, changes of opinions, asking for forgiveness – these are just some of the ways that we do it.

Jesus said it best when He said: “In this world you will have troubles, but take heart because I've overcome the world.” This was the summation of the Kingdom of God that Jesus ushered in, and it is easily the central theme of EPIC.

## **SENSITIVITY**

We are wounded people and out of these wounds flow much of our attitudes and decisions. We seek to be a people and place of healing for such wounds and so we are committed to moving with a high level sensitivity. By His own mouth Jesus made it clear He did not come to condemn but to give life to humanity both in the present now and eternally. We believe that attacking culture and people can do nothing but put distance between ourselves and the people Jesus loves and thus distance them from Jesus as well. This does not mean we will compromise who we are or what we believe, but it does mean we will not tear another down to make clear our own identity.

## **ONENESS**

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We are but a small part of the body of Christ and we seek to remain faithful both to God and His Kingdom and to each other. To be this kind of church we believe love is foundational and that we are called by God to be in relationship with people; both Christian and non-Christian alike without reservations. We are called to see people as people; as objects of God's love and not with the social distinctions we so often impose upon each other. We will be a community firmly united in the love of God and the mission to love others as God loves.

## UNDERSTANDING THIS GENERATION

It is essential for the Church to understand the generation in which it is living in order to connect with it. This is nothing new, we're simply taking the mantle for this generation.

The Contemporary church made drastic changes to connect with the baby boomer generation. It remains relevant to that generation while a new generation is emerging. Now the responsibility of the Church is to relate to both on their individual, unique levels. Still a tension exists as we try to be the Church to both generations. And that's what we're feeling today.

## THE CRY OF THE HEARTS OF THIS EMERGING GENERATION

### **1. The Encounter**

There is a desire of this generation to not just know about, but to encounter the presence of God and explore the mystery and power of Him. There is a demand for experience – the experience of love, power, presence, deliverance, and hope.

### **2. Authenticity/Raw**

This is a generation that recognizes and acknowledges pain, suffering, flaws, and weaknesses and desires to see a Church that acknowledges them as well, and doesn't live in denial in what is around them. It also acknowledges its own weaknesses and flaws and its desperate need for God. This means an honest, open communication of both good and bad in our lives individually and as a community.

### **3. Revolution/Social Issues**

This generation desires a God who is intimately involved with all of creation, Who sees all forms of injustice – sin, poverty, homelessness, disease, etc. – as moral issues that He came to the world to redeem.

We understand preaching the Gospel the responsibility of redeeming the whole world to Christ and sees itself as the caretaker of the world and the people

strategically left in place to solve its problems through the power of the Holy Spirit.

#### **4. Penetrating culture (mustard seed)**

Being roughly 4% Christian\*, this emerging generation is unversed, ignorant, uninvolved, and indifferent with the conversation that the contemporary Church is having with the other generation.

This generation is very involved, outspoken, demanding, and conversant with modern culture. In fact, it itself is a very much a dissident voice to modern culture.

The Church has to not only respond differently to a generation that is disengaged with their conversation, but the Church also has to view itself as a catalyst to cultivate the culture.

Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed.

*\* The Bridger Generation: America's Second Largest Generation, What They Believe, How to Reach Them – Thom Rainer*

#### **Matthew 13:31-32**

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches."

In context, Jesus' audience knew the mustard seed to not just be small and insignificant, but a nuisance as planting a mustard plant (tree/bush) meant an overgrowing of crops, hills, and whatever else in the vicinity. As a result, Roman law inhibited the planting and growing of mustard plants.

So when Jesus spoke this parable, it was controversial in that He was talking about another Kingdom that was foolish and insignificant but one that would rise up and take over and grow among culture.

Jesus' intent from day one was not to create a subculture but to cultivate the culture. Penetrate and redeem. He said it in many other ways as well: light in the dark, salt in the rottenness, Wheat among weeds, etc.

In the same way, a Church engaging this emerging generation must be willing to work from the inside out of culture.

To penetrate culture it requires the Church to have more expressions of faith than simply corporate worship and teaching which this generation does not understand or relate to. This doesn't mean that we don't have a value for those things, but that we see this generation's lack of understanding of it as an opportunity to rethink our own understandings of our expression of faith, worship, and community. It requires the Church to have a living, breathing, active faith, a compelling lifestyle, and felt experience of God in us.

Instead of forcing a new generation to engage in our conversation, we instead choose to join theirs.

If we truly believe that Jesus is relevant for all peoples, all cultures, and for all times, then the Church must engage in ways to (re)introduce Him to a people with the backdrop of the culture with which they are familiar and fully engaged.

A generation unacquainted with the Church can be acquainted with Jesus if the conversation is wrapped around by the familiar.

Culture isn't something to be feared, but stands as the meeting ground for conversation and for Jesus to be re-introduced

## **5. All Encompassing**

This generation wants faith that's more than simply religious duty or moments of the sacred. That they want a faith that bleeds into every aspect and fiber of their lives – a faith that is real and tangible and is just as much a part of their morning coffee as it is their Sunday gatherings.

Faith has to be uncompartimentalized. Every moment, every task, every action has to be understood as been made holy by God and an opportunity for worship.

**A few books that have shaped me over the years:**

Dear Church – Letters from a Disillusioned Generation – Sarah Cunningham

Velvet Elvis – Repainting the Christian Faith – Rob Bell

The Barbarian Way – Erwin McManus

An Emergent Manifesto of Hope – Doug Pagitt & Tony Jones

Soul Tsunami – Leonard Sweet

Convergence Culture – Henry Jenkins

Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers – Alissa Quart

The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical - Shane Claiborne

Revolution – George Barna

Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry – Doug Fields

Your First 2 Years in Youth Ministry – Doug Fields

Searching for God Knows What – Donald Miller

Top 10 Rules of Youth Ministry and Why 180 Breaks Them All – Blaine Bartel

***EPIC COMMITMENTS***

I will be ONE.

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- √ I will follow our leaders (pray, trust, support)
- √ I will believe the best of the people around me.
- √ I refuse to gossip.
- √ I will check my attitudes & motives.
- √ I will not allow others to continue in healthy behaviors – to themselves or others – that could destroy oneness.
- √ I will be examined by God.

*Romans 14:19; Ephesians 4:29; Psalm 139:23*

### **I will be EXCELLENT.**

*1 Kings 5-8 & 2 Chronicles 1-7*

### **I will GROW.**

EPIC is a leadership culture where you are expected to Learn, Grow, & Thrive.

- √ Remain teachable
- √ Attend Meetings & Trainings
- √ Read resources provided
- √ Ask – there are no stupid questions

### **I will be EXAMINED by God.**

*Psalm 139:23*

### **I will OWN.**

- √ In a very real way, every teen, every person, every ministry role, every action, every conversation – every part of this ministry belongs to you.
  - √ Though there are area-specific responsibilities, our roles often overlap as we own this ministry together.
  - √ Like a body, we seek, worship, praise, suffer, anguish, celebrate together.
  - √ We believe in synergy and the fact that every role matters.
- 1 Corinthians 12:14-26*

## GENERAL EXPECTATIONS

- √ On Time:
  - Production – Sundays @ 5:00pm
  - Sound – Sundays @ 4:30pm
  - All Leaders – Sundays @ 5:30pm
  
- √ Prepared
  - Tasks completed
  - Heart ready
  - Looking on both natural & spiritual levels for opportunity
- √ Connecting w/ Students (& not adults)
- √ Setting the Environment
  - Greeting every person within 10 feet of you
  - Be aware of the tone of your surroundings and influence them.
  - Greet every teen.
  - Use appropriate physical touch.
  - Model for, influence, and challenge the people around you
  
- √ Attend all meetings, trainings, & special events
  - Leader Meetings – 1<sup>st</sup> Thursday of every month unless specified
  
- √ In case of absence, it is your responsibility to find a replacement for your role.

NOTE: In order to facilitate scheduling all schedule requests should be in by the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month.

I understand and commit to the vision and expectations of EPIC.

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SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER

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## **The Failure of Youth Ministry**

by Mike Yaconelli

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What is the most important function of youth ministry?

- A) Introducing young people to Jesus
- B) Providing healthy activities
- C) Involving young people in service
- D) Abstinence pledges
- E) Good theological training
- F) Worship

Answer: None of the above.

The most important function of youth ministry is longevity. Long-term discipleship.

It's my contention that the vast majority of youth ministries focus all of their time and energy on the none-of-the-aboves and very little on longevity. How do I know?

Look at the results.

Attend any youth group in this country and notice the "ageing effect."

Attendance is directly proportional to age. The older the students, the fewer are likely to attend youth group. Typically, there are more freshman than sophomores, more sophomores than juniors, and more juniors than seniors.

I'm sure there are many reasons for this phenomenon. Older students are more likely to work, more likely to have a car, and more likely to be extremely busy. But the real reason is that older students are much more likely to lose interest in Christianity, lose the desire to stay close to Christ, or don't lose the willingness to pay the price of commitment. In the everyday battle for the souls of the older students, the lure of the secular is just too strong.

Almost every study out there shows that when it comes to moral behavior, there's no difference between secular and Christian students. They drink as much, screw as much, have oral sex as much, and party as much.

Why?

Youth ministry doesn't have any staying power.

Young people flock to Christian concerts, cheer Jesus at large events, and work on service projects. Unfortunately, it's not because of Jesus; it's because they're young!

The success of youth ministry in this country is an illusion.

Very little youth ministry has a lasting impact on students.

I believe we're no more effective today reaching young people with the gospel than we've ever been. In spite of all the dazzling super stars of youth ministry, the amazing array of YS products, the thousands of youth ministry training events, nothing much has changed.

Following Jesus is hard.

Faith is difficult.

Discipleship requires a huge investment of time. Most of us don't have the time. Or we chose not to take the time. Or our current models of ministry don't allow us the time.

So let's be honest.

Youth ministry as an experiment has failed. If we want to see the church survive, we need to rethink youth ministry.

What does that mean? I don't have a clue. But my hunch is that if we want to see young people have a faith that lasts, then we have to completely change the way we do youth ministry in America.

I wonder if any of us has the courage to try.

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The Dangerous Wonder column is a regular feature in Youthworker, the contemporary journal of youth ministry—produced by Youth Specialties; published by CCM Communications. For more information on subscribing and how to get a free trial issue, visit the official Youthworker Web site or call 800/769-7624; outside the US and Canada, 815/734-1217.