

Journal of Adventist Youth and Young Adult Ministries

Volume 1 *Ministry Through COVID and Beyond*

Article 15

6-1-2023

180° Symposium 2022 Focus Group—Practitioners

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Recommended Citation

Pickell, Ron (2023) "180° Symposium 2022 Focus Group—Practitioners," *Journal of Adventist Youth and Young Adult Ministries*: Vol. 1, Article 15.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jayyam/vol1/iss1/15>

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180° SYMPOSIUM 2022

FOCUS GROUP—PRACTITIONERS

Facilitator: Ron Pickell (Pastor, Berkeley LIFE Church).

Participants: Ricardo Bain (Pastor, Maranatha SDA Church), Steve Case (President, Involve Youth), Benji Ferguson (Youth Pastor, Carmichael SDA Church), Akram Kahn (Business Manager, Center for Youth Evangelism), Myoung Kwon (Pastor, Waukesha SDA Church).

JOURNAL REFLECTION OF THE PROCESS

THE ACADEMICS Focus Group discussed how the church will think differently about its mission and message beyond COVID-19. The Administrators Focus Group reflected on what administrative changes will be necessary moving forward past COVID-19, while the Practitioners Focus Group wrestled with what the church will do differently—how the pandemic has changed the way we live and practice our faith.

The 180 Symposium provided a wonderful space to consider each important angle of the post-pandemic mission. In the Practitioners Focus Group we spent time reflecting on each paper and presentation during our brief time together narrowing our deeper discussion to Paper #1 – Changing Church Culture, #3 – Parental Push Approach to Young Adult Ministry, #6 – A New Story for a Generation, #7 – Tigers or Strawberries and #8 – Transforming Trauma. Reference was also made to paper #2 – Pathfinders Ministry Flourishing During the Pandemic, #4 Hanging Out on the Block Chain and #5 – COVID-19 and Crisis Conflict, but we spent more time on the other papers/presentations and their relationship to post pandemic youth/young adult ministry.

The term neo-plasticity became a central point for our discussion—the brain's ability to change its structure and function in response to experience or damage. We discussed the huge opportunity before the church in journeying with an entire generation of young people with the possibility of not only changing brain structure, but the shape of their spiritual hearts.

Hearing or learning the Gen Z narrative which now includes their experience with COVID-19 is the window to neo-plasticity and the development of new brain/heart pathways. This new understanding and connectivity will need to be intergenerational. The parental push approach is pivotal if the church is going to work together. Gen Z will also need and benefit from the stories of earlier generations. It is in listening to and telling our stories that we find where our lives connect. The post-pandemic church will need more emphasis on listening and telling our stories. This was already true before the pandemic, but considering the isolation, fear, and anxiety created by the pandemic the need for such understanding has only increased.

We also discussed how much church and life have been reshuffled due to the pandemic. Faith has become more personal and less communal. Church is becoming more kingdom-focused than church-focused. We discussed how pre-COVID-19 our faith life was more characterized by church facilities, programs, and organizational structure. The pandemic has taught us to prioritize the mission of Jesus, place more emphasis on personal faith, and simplify church.

After discussing what seemed the heart of what will help define successful post-pandemic youth/young adult ministry we narrowed our ideas to ten. This brought us to the end of our focus group time. Members later posted their practical ministry suggestions on slack. Each practical ministry suggestion was then organized under our ten main ideas. Each ministry idea and practical ministry suggestion are presented here to equip the post-pandemic

church, youth and young adult ministry for the hope of our post-pandemic world!

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Because COVID-19 exposed discipleship deficiencies, steps to address this could include:
 - Intentional small groups to be “growth groups” with an investment in discipleship.
 - Establish and repeatedly infuse a relational foundation.
2. This is an ideal time to start a youth and/or young adult ministry. With the decimation of so many groups, it’s prime time to start from scratch instead of merely repeating the past or attempting to rebuild with the intention of replicating the past instead of envisioning the future. Start small. Begin with young people and those supportive of them. Expect youth and young adults to lead the way. Promote more flexibility.
3. Ministry gatherings must be experienced in multiple avenues—in-person, virtually, and hybrid. Consider both those who are connected and those who are not yet connected.
4. Worship with intentionality, not merely to be habitual. Aim for quality rather than popularity. Make periodic assessments and communicate. This can be as simple as a town hall-style of interactions. Ask if the church exists to maintain forms or to add value.
5. Promote mental health healing. The pandemic removed secrets for pastors and parishioners. We all need help—physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. Instead of posturing perfection, promote openness.
6. Build bridges, not walls. This could be paraphrased as more purple and less red and blue.
7. Make the focus of your gatherings with people kingdom-centered rather than church-centered. Christ invited people to his kingdom, not his church facility. Combat the rampant North American cultural individualism with purposeful give-and-take in community. We are no longer bound by four walls, so see your “church” as the entire community. Ask (and answer) this question, “If my church ceased to exist, would the community notice?” Use that as an indicator of the level of impact you and your church are making in your community.
8. Prioritize young people in order to become intergenerational and not a social club headed to extinction. Expect young people to receive visions and dreams. Empower them to pursue these.
9. Commend SDA teachers. They did amazing things in big ways through the pandemic, using creativity and supernatural endurance in the spasmodically-changing school years.
10. In order to intentionally function from a relation base, include interactive components in the main worship gathering. While the worship service must have a vertical dimension of worshipping the Almighty God, include horizontal dimensions for community building within the worship service. Here are just a few examples of the types of things that could promote this:
 - Spend time mixing with others during the church service and report two updates from the past week: 1) Something that happened by or for “the church,” and 2) Something that happened by or for “the kingdom.”
 - As a different type of conversation starter (besides, “Hi, how are you going?”), use something like the “Jesus 4P” to check in with people about how they are doing and their relationship with Christ. The four P’s are: Purpose, Pardon, Peace, and Power. You might come up with your own four P’s, such as: Praise, Prayer, Preparation, and Partnership.
 - Toward the close of a sermon, emphasize application by getting in groups of three or four people and share your personal plan to apply the sermon to your life in the coming week. If you and your congregation are not accustomed to this, it may require some coach for a few weeks or months. This can also lead to the topic of greeting the next time you gather for worship—tell me about what happened when you applied the previous sermon to your life.

