

Kyle's Story –by Kyle Felker...former Youth Pastor

I earned a Youth Ministry degree in my undergraduate work, and then went on to work for a church after I finished seminary in the summer of 2000. I was to focus most of my time on the Youth Ministry of the church while doing some of the coordinating for the Childrens ministry and developing the Family ministry as well (though there was no clear direction about what exactly that was to be). There were a bunch of kids in the youth group already, and we seemed to have programs and systems already in place to keep things going. While I did do some shuffling around of programs, mostly what I did was organize existing stuff. Things seemed to be going pretty good at first. There was some numerical growth, and there seemed to be some real discipleship going on as well. I received some encouragement regarding my teaching, and I connected well with many of the kids, and relationships seemed to be growing.

My biggest struggle was the administrative part of the process. Parents felt that I was not getting them information soon enough or with enough detail. Furthermore, the church I was in ran a very wide range from very conservative home schooling families to families that were easy going and let their kids make a lot of decisions about what they did. As time went on it seemed like I had a harder and harder time striking the balance between these two groups.

I was always of the mind to let the kids have a lot of input in planning the youth group. I set the guidelines and they filled them in with things they were passionate about, or felt their friends would want to go to. This went over great with the kids, but then one parent told me that she was offended by what we were doing at youth group and she felt like I could not be trusted. This all reached an apex at my one year review when an appointed church board gave me a list of things in my job they did not think I was doing satisfactorily.

This was like a kick to the stomach for me, and from that point on it seemed like one of three groups was always upset with the way I was doing my job. The kids thought I was too controlling and uptight. The parents thought I was too disorganized and did not listen to them enough. The church board thought I was not keeping the other two groups in balance enough. Along with all this, new duties were being added to my responsibility (like sitting in on the committee to help start a preschool), that made my job more and more administrative (my weakest area). The spinning plates were starting to fall and I could not keep them going anymore.

It seemed like I spent very little time doing any of the things that I got into youth ministry to do! I was an administrator and a political negotiator between parents, youth, and church board members. I had begun to feel like the most important question in front of me each week was, "Who is going to be mad at me next?"

I think it is also important to note that during my time in ministry, it was also one of the most spiritually dry times I have ever experienced. Much of that is my own fault for not being diligent in my quiet times and making the Lord first in my life. When I needed to be drawing closest to God, I was getting further away. However, it seemed that I was so busy with church I had no time for Jesus.

I eventually left the church. I interviewed with a couple of other churches, but quickly realized I did not have the energy to try and start out in another ministry all over again. Ultimately I decided to find a job to pay the bills so that I could be a volunteer and just do the parts of ministry that I was gifted at.

The stuff that I went through as a Youth Pastor was difficult. A youth pastor friend of mine during that time was partnered with another youth pastor, and I remember telling him how fortunate they were to at least have each other to talk to about these types of struggles.

Even Paul had Silas, and having another person to walk through the stuff with you is invaluable. Someone who knows how it feels and can be a sounding board and confidant. That person has to be able to kick you in the rear for your own good too. I never had that at my church. I felt like everyone was on a side and I was alone in the middle. I wish there had been an experienced youth pastor to come along side me and walk with me through the issues I was having, and help me keep a level head. That, as I see it, is the mission of Exago, to be an advocate and confidant to youth pastors who must then navigate the tricky waters of the church.

It may not be fair, but Youth Pastors are often not treated as members of the church. In many ways...they are "Staff to minister" - not to be ministered too. This hired gun mentality leads us Youth Pastors to hide the chinks in our armor instead of exposing them and saying, "I am nothing more than a guy a little bit further down the road with some training, but I love these kids and I would like to commit my life to helping them see the kind of men and women God could make them to be."

As I see it, most youth pastors coming out of College or Seminary have a head full of knowledge, a heart for kids...and the same real world understanding that God gave a doorstep. They are dying for someone to minister to them as they minister to others. Where the church is failing, is in the challenge to stand in that gap.

Exago has our support, our prayers, and our thanks for planning to help Youth Leaders work through challenges, rather than looking for work outside of ministry. My wife and I are praying for Exago, and looking forward to hearing stories of what is accomplished through its ministry.

All the best,

Kyle Felker