

P R E L U D E

THE YOUTH MINISTRY SYMPHONY

An Explanation and Introduction

sym•pho•ny (sĭm'fə-nē)

1. An extended piece of music, for orchestra, in three or more movements.
2. A symphonic orchestra.
3. An orchestral concert.
4. Something characterized by a harmonious combination of elements.¹

re•new (rĭ-nōo')

1. To make new or as if new again; restore.
2. To take up again; resume.
3. To regain or restore the physical or mental vigor of; revive.
4. To replenish.
5. To bring into being again; reestablish.

Asymphonic orchestra is comprised of many musicians and instruments. Although each musician can play his or her instrument well, the musicians need each other. No musician or instrument is more important than another, nor can the orchestra play the symphony without every musician and every instrument. The composer wrote the symphony with every instrument in mind. The violin section cannot say, "We don't need the cellos," or the oboe section say, "We can play without





the percussion.” Every instrument, be it piccolo or viola or clarinet, is essential to the success of the orchestra. Only when the musicians all play together, under the direction of the conductor, can the glory of the symphony be heard.



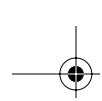
The passage above is my own version (MOV) of 1 Corinthians 12:12-26. Paul actually uses a body metaphor in this text to describe the church; I rewrote it partly because my daughter plays the violin, so the orchestra metaphor is particularly relevant to me these days. It’s also helpful to hear a fresh “spin” on a Bible passage from time to time.

The Orchestra of Youth Ministry

In my ministry travels, I get to see a variety of youth ministry philosophies, styles and programs. I find that some focus for the most part on church-ed kids and discipleship, while others target the unchurched and emphasize evangelism. Some do both. Some youth groups are populated with kids sporting Tommy Hilfiger and Abercrombie & Fitch gear; other groups consist of students with multiple body piercings and tattoos. Some ministries baptize by immersion; others do so by sprinkling. A few probably dry clean. But whatever their style or method, I enjoy them all. Their diversity flows out of and reflects the heart of God, the Divine Composer. As the Conductor, the Holy Spirit, works with the diverse “instruments” to get them to play together, they produce heavenly music of incomparable beauty. The orchestra of the church, under the expert baton of the Conductor, plays a symphony that is both pleasing to God and touching to the hearts of those created to hear it.

I have structured what follows with this metaphor in mind. My musical expertise is mostly limited to thrashing on the gui-





tar as a song **leader**,* so I won't stretch the metaphor too far. But I think it is appropriate in terms of both the style and the content of what you will be reading.

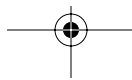
A symphony is usually comprised of three to four movements. To get the most out of the symphony it is best to listen from beginning to end. But you can, if you so choose, listen to one or more of the movements alone and still enjoy the music. Stylistically, I have divided this book into movements as well. While it is best to

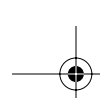
read it from start to finish, if you choose to skip a movement, or a chapter within a movement, that's cool; you can still benefit from the sections that you do read.

I wrote this book with every member of the youth ministry "orchestra" in mind. Although I occasionally mention youth ministry methodology and strategy, my focus is on transferable principles—biblical truths that will make us all better youth ministry "musicians" no matter what "instrument" we play, be it first chair violin or the person who gets to slam the cymbals together from time to time. I address issues that relate to individual youth worker "musicians" as well as to the youth ministry symphonic orchestra as a whole.

But be forewarned: this is not a book about how to do youth ministry. It is a book about how to be youth ministers, vocational or volunteer, both individually and corporately. The distinction, in my mind, is huge.

***"YOUTH
WORSHIP
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IS A RECENT
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Being Versus Doing

We are all familiar with the story of Jesus at the home of Mary and Martha. Mary was hanging out with Jesus, while Martha was busy preparing sushi in the kitchen, more than a little bothered that she wasn't getting any help from her sister. Jesus addressed her stress: " 'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her' " (Luke 10:41-42).

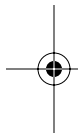
Martha was, at her core, a do-er, while Mary was more of a be-er. We see this at the funeral of their brother Lazarus, when

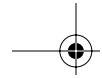
*I WOULD HAVE
MADE BLACKENED
GALILEAN FISH—
I HATE
SUSHI.

Martha ran out to meet Jesus as he approached to ask him why he didn't show up earlier to keep their brother from dying, while Mary remained at home. One could also say that Martha operated primarily from the "outside," while Mary did so from the "inside"—if you catch my drift.

I can identify with Martha; I would have run out to meet Jesus as well. And to be honest, I probably would have been in the **kitchen*** too. I tend to be an "outside first" guy; most youth workers are. Perhaps it is built into our DNA. We have this tendency to be more concerned about how to *do* youth ministry well than how to *be* youth ministers well. And that, according to Jesus, can be a problem.

Obviously, doing is not a bad thing. Without Martha, Jesus and Mary would have gone hungry. Mary wasn't all right and Martha all wrong. Similarly, both an inside and outside approach are needed for effective ministry. The problem is the tendency of youth ministry, and many youth workers, to





have an imbalanced emphasis on the outside of youth ministry—how we do it—and a corresponding neglect of the inside, or being—who we are as youth workers. The outside of youth ministry needs to flow from the inside of youth workers. Given the current state of much of youth ministry, one might even say that youth ministry needs to be turned inside out.

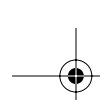
I have been doing youth ministry for a quarter century and have no plans to take a demotion to any other line of work. I love youth, I love youth workers, I love youth ministry, and I think I'm wired for it—I think young, **act young*** and feel young. Only my birth certificate and my mirror betray me. But a fair amount of individual and corporate fine tuning is in order if we are to play the Divine Symphony that will reach the emerging generations of youth. Yes, it will take a thorough understanding of postmodernism; yes, we will always need to be culturally aware and relevant in our style and message. But we have not even come close to seeing the Great Commission fulfilled among recent generations of young people (at least in Western countries), and the prognosis for the future is not encouraging if the research of folks like George Barna is right. In his 1999 report "Third Millennium Teens," Barna identifies myths and realities of the state of youth ministry:

*ON OCCASION
I ACT TOO YOUNG,
SAY MY
DAUGHTER
AND SON.

Myth: The church is where teen spiritual progress is made.

Reality: Spiritual development in teenagers depends mostly on their family.





Myth: Today's youth group attenders are tomorrow's church leaders.

Reality: Today's youth group attenders are tomorrow's unchurched.

Barna summarizes: "If we continue to minister in ways in which we are doing so today, we are strategically facilitating the demise of the Church we exist to build."²

Turning youth ministry inside out could also be called youth ministry renewal. The dictionary defines *renewal* using a whole lot of other "re-" verbs—*restore, resume, regain, revive,*

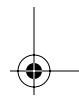
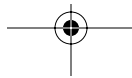
***LET'S KEEP THE
WATER BALLOON
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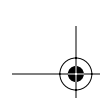
replenish, reestablish—each of which is a part of spiritual renewal. The prefix *re* implies going back to something that was previously attained or returning to an earlier state. I like that.

Let me clarify, though: I have no desire to go back to the days of youth ministry when I spent Wednesday afternoons reinforcing cardboard refrigerator boxes with duct tape so they wouldn't explode when kids slammed into each other with the boxes over their heads. Or once again wiring a wire mesh-seated stool with a sizable battery to make the infamous "hot seat." **No thank you.*** And "Kumbaya," "One in the Spirit" and "Pass It On" are probably best left in the annals of youth ministry hymnology.

By using the word *renewal* in reference to inside-out youth ministry, I am alluding to a variety of spiritual "going backs":

- going back to our first love
- going back to the time when we were more excited about being followers of Jesus than we were about doing ministry



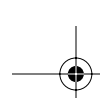


- going back to a fresh Isaiah-style encounter with the Living God that both ruins us and heals us
- going back to the place of prayer, which includes both talking to God and slowing down enough to hear his still small voice
- going back to the time when we were more desperate to see kids ushered into the kingdom than we were to look good attempting it
- going back to a relational, incarnational approach to ministry with an emphasis on the latter characteristic
- going back to the words of Jesus and realizing that love and unity are a really big deal to God

This is the flavor of inside-out renewal that will fill the pages to come. When we youth ministry musicians are playing our instruments together, under the direction of the Conductor, the Composer will be honored and glorified as his divine music reverberates throughout all creation. We will reach generations of youth, and his kingdom will advance in radical and wonderful ways.

Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may return;
renew our days as of old. (Lamentations 5:21)





SELAH

*Come, Thou Almighty King, help us Thy name to sing,
help us to praise.*

*Father, all-glorious, o'er all victorious,
Come, and reign over us, Ancient of Days.*

*Come, Thou Incarnate Word, gird on Thy mighty
sword, our prayer attend:*

*Come, and Thy people bless, and give Thy Word
success;*

Spirit of holiness, on us descend.



*Come, Holy Comforter, Thy sacred witness bear in this
glad hour:*

*Thou who almighty art, now rule in every heart,
And ne'er from us depart, Spirit of power.*



*To Thee, great One in Three, eternal praises be hence
evermore.*

*Thy sovereign majesty may we in glory see,
And to eternity love and adore.*

"COME, THOU ALMIGHTY KING"
ANONYMOUS, CIRCA 1757

