

An Exercise in Missing the Point

by [Mark DeVries](#)

(First published in The Youth Ministry Consultant Column of [Group Magazine](#), 2009)

“You and I just have totally different philosophies of youth ministry,” the frustrated intern told his youth pastor boss.

“Really? Tell me about that,” his boss replied.

“You are all about programs. For me...it’s all about relationship. I’d be happy just hanging out with kids one-on-one, without any programs at all.”

Wouldn’t we all?

Wouldn’t it be great if we, as youth pastors, could go back to a simpler time when all we had to do was hang out with kids and help them discover their faith, one conversation at a time? The truth is...we can.

All we have to do is shift from being a paid staff person (or the person in charge) to being a volunteer. Once we join the ranks of paid staff or take a point leadership role, our responsibilities shift from simply building our own relationships with kids to creating those opportunities for other adults.

The sentimental fallacy behind the “relationships-only” philosophy of ministry is obvious:

1. Program-free, relationships-only youth ministry only exists in the imagination of the inexperienced. Ministries that attempt this approach almost always wind up with the vast majority of the youth leaders “doing relationships” with a select few kids who are easy to be with, eager to grow, or who pursue a relationship with us, ignoring the harder-to-reach kids God has given into our care.
2. Anarchy is not a philosophy of youth ministry. At first blush, it seems so like Jesus, doesn’t it—just “do relationships”? But take a closer look—Jesus had a very specific, uh, program for exactly *how* he would make disciples.
3. Youth ministry is not, first and foremost, about youth workers doing what makes them “happy.” It is often about swimming upstream, doing the things no one else is doing, building like no one else is building, in order to reach the kids no one else is reaching.

I hope you’re as weary as I am with the simplistic polarization between relationships and programs, as if someone can take responsibility for ministry to more than a handful of kids without both. Intentional programs multiply relationships.

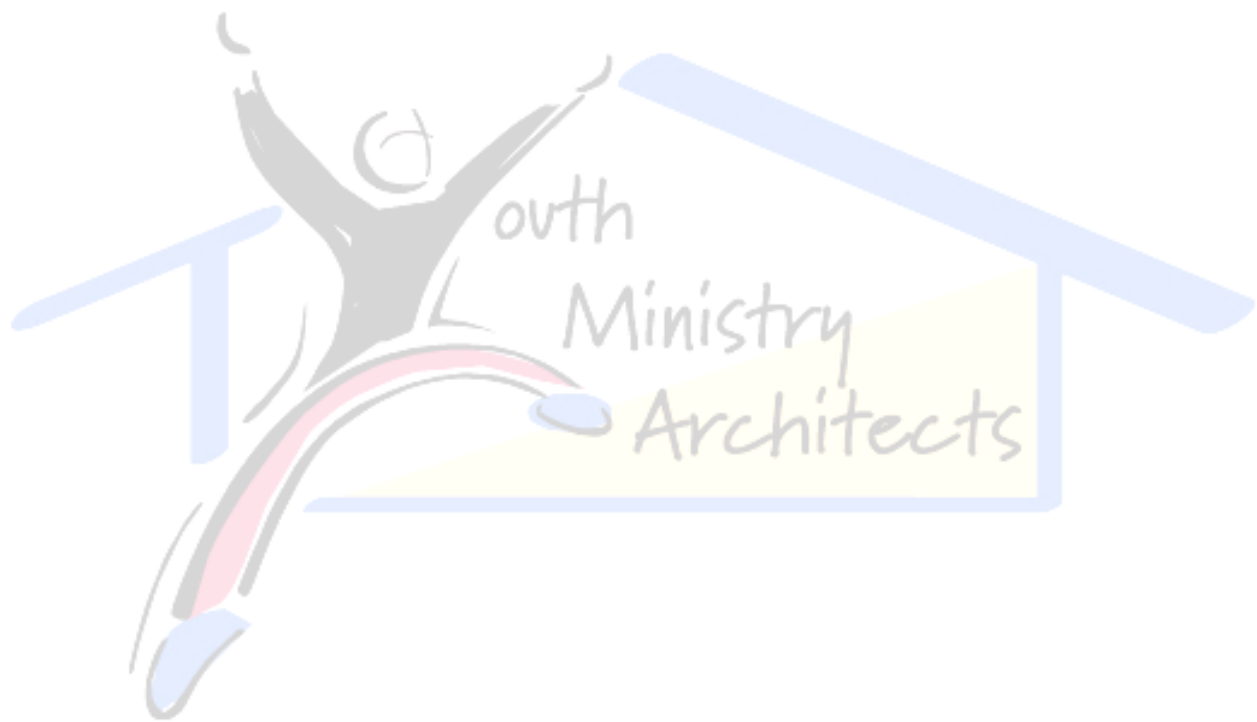
Youth ministry is still about one adult investing in one kid at a time. But as youth ministers, we are called not just to build relationships but to create systems (some might call them programs) that allow other adults to have the thrill of investing in one kid at a time.

Building Sustainable Youth Ministries.....One Church at a Time

5229 Cochran Drive Nashville, TN 37220 Phone/Fax (877) 462-5718

www.ymarchitects.com info@ymarchitects.com

Mark DeVries is the founder of Youth Ministry Architects (www.ymarchitects.com), a hands-on youth ministry consulting team. He is author of **Sustainable Youth Ministry** and co-author with Jeff Dunn-Rankin of the 2011 release books, **The Indispensable Youth Pastor** and **Before You Hire a Youth Pastor**. Since 1986, Mark has been serving as Pastor to Youth & Their Families at First Presbyterian Church in Nashville, Tennessee



Building Sustainable Youth Ministries.....One Church at a Time

5229 Cochran Drive Nashville, TN 37220 Phone/Fax (877) 462-5718

www.ymarchitects.com info@ymarchitects.com