

Children and Youth

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What's Theological about Youth Ministry?

Coordinator of the Ridley Centre for Children's and Youth Ministry, **Graham Stanton** ponders.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN THE CHURCH

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$$P = (m/2 + f/3) \times 0.2$$

Where **m** is the number of males at youth group, and **f** is the number of females present, **P** is the number of pizzas you need to order for supper.*

An equation for calculating the number of pizzas to order for Friday night youth group - is this what comes to mind when you hear about someone doing a PhD in youth ministry?

In reality, robust theological reflection about children's and youth ministry has been going on for some time. The latest incarnation of the Ridley Centre for Children's and Youth Ministry is another step in the development of this kind of thinking.

The inaugural *Australian Consultation in Youth Ministry* was held at Ridley back in 1998. Papers from that gathering were published in the book *Towards a Theology of Youth Ministry* (edited by Sue Bazzana and Stephen Hale. Aquilla, 1999). Its contents page reads like a who's-who of Australian leaders in youth ministry at the time. It wasn't until 2011 that IVP published a book titled *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry* (Kenda Creasy Dean and Andrew Root). Australian thinking in this field is at least up to date with, if not ahead of, the international conversation.

But what is a theology of youth ministry? It's more than producing a version of Mike Bird's *Evangelical Theology* as a graphic novel in a mobile app! A significant part of the answer to this question is recognising the teenage experience as both a challenge and a gift for the whole church. The challenge lies in how to communicate the good news of Jesus to young people in ways that are engaging and persuasive. The gift comes from considering how the adult church can hear the good news of Jesus in fresh ways from young people.

Meeting the challenge and appreciating the gift calls for a thick understanding of youth experience. A theology of children's and youth ministry will draw on insights from sociology, psychology, and educational theory. The aim isn't to find new revelation outside Scripture.

Instead we are seeking to understand more about young peoples' experience and meaning-making. These insights form a lens through which we return to Scripture. Sometimes we come with new questions with which to re-interrogate the text. Sometimes we come with new answers to re-examine the text. Other times we find perspectives that open up vistas in the text we haven't seen before.

How might the church help young people meet Jesus as they listen to and reflect on Scripture? How might the whole church listen to and learn from the insights young people gain? How might youth leaders advocate for the voices of young people to be heard in the life of the church? Part of the vision for the Ridley Centre for Children's and Youth Ministry is to enable each of these tasks. I hope this issue of the *Ridley Report* gives you a sense of some of what this centre is doing towards fulfilling this vision.

* Credit goes to Ridley student Dave Chiswell for this piece of practical wisdom. It would be interesting to validate whether or not the formula results in acceptable levels of supper satisfaction for different age-groups, or how the formula needs to be adjusted to cater for vegetarians and people who don't like anchovies! Perhaps there's a research project in it!



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2018 Events

May 25

Faith and Work Award Dinner
with Glenn Stevens, former Governor
of the Reserve Bank of Australia

June 19

CCYM Public Lecture
*Raising Christian Children
for Life in a Secular World*

July 19

Alfred Stanway Lecture in Global Mission
*The Future of Contextualisation:
The Next Ten years in Missions*
with Scott Moreau

July 28

Evangelical Women in Academia Conference
Finding Her Voice
with Katya Covrett and Katy Smith

August 21 – 22

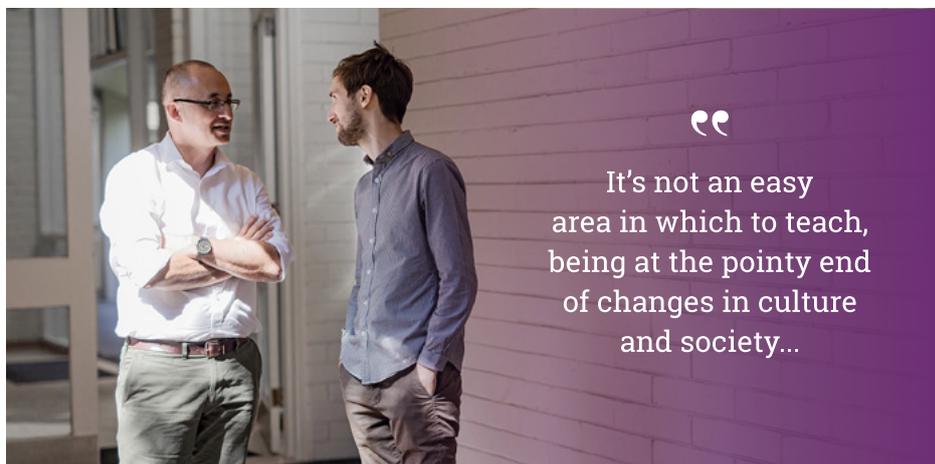
Annual Preachers' Conference
*The Story of God:
Preaching Old Testament Narrative*
with Paul Barker, Murray Capill and Mary Lewis

October 10 and 11

Ridley Open Day and Evening

Check the Ridley website for times & locations:
www.ridley.edu.au/events or join our events
mailing list: j.daw@ridley.edu.au

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Above: Graham Stanton (left) on campus.



It's not an easy
area in which to teach,
being at the pointy end
of changes in culture
and society...

Pracademics

Graham Stanton,
a Ridley Pracademic,
is heading up the **Centre for
Children's and Youth Ministry**,
writes **Brian Rosner**.



FROM THE PRINCIPAL

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Ridley College has a long history of and reputation for solid biblical study and sound theology, for which we give thanks to God. This commitment goes back to the time of Leon Morris and beyond. And in our day it is the reason why many of our students come to study with us. Indeed, one of our values is 'high academic standards under the authority of Scripture, engaging with the history of Christian thought.' We believe that rigorous study of the Bible is the foundation for a lifetime of effective Christian service.

As our mission statement puts it, Ridley College exists to 'equip men and women for God's mission in a rapidly changing and increasingly complex world'. We don't just want students to learn about God and his Word, but also to become effective in promoting the gospel in whatever setting God places them.

In this light, the College faculty has recently grown in expertise in what is often called practical theology, the practical application of theological insights to everyday concerns. We are now better placed than ever to help students translate the academic study of the Bible into effective ministry practice, be it in the church, workplace, home or community, or with a variety of age groups.

No fewer than four of our faculty fit this description: Tim Foster, Richard Trist and Graham Stanton now have doctorates in areas

of ministry application; and Diane Hockridge is hot on their heels. We affectionately call them our 'pracademics', our in-house word for practical academics. I hasten to add that this by no means condemns the rest of us on the faculty as impractical! It's just that in the case of these four the focus is on theological reflection on ministry practice.

This edition of the *Ridley Report* focuses on the work of Graham Stanton. Graham recently completed his doctorate at the University of Queensland on practices of Bible engagement for spiritual formation of teenagers. He is heading up the newly-launched Ridley Centre for Children's and Youth Ministry. Graham has worked in this area for twenty years, most recently as the Principal of Youthworks College in Sydney.

Ridley has done some great work in the past teaching about youth and children's ministry. It's not an easy area in which to teach, being at the pointy end of changes in culture and society. You might even say that it is 'rapidly changing and increasingly complex.' But as everyone knows it's a vital area of ministry in the church and one that is close to the heart of all Christian parents.

Let's be praying that the new Centre goes from strength to strength.

Brian Rosner, Principal

Pioneering Research into Youth Ministry



Viv Cheung, lecturer at Youthworks and Ridley MA student, attended the IASYM Conference at Ridley in April.



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF YOUTH MINISTRY, AUSTRALASIAN CONFERENCE

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Youth ministry is important. Jesus values young people as precious to him in his kingdom. By God's grace, recent years have seen increasing numbers of specialising ministers passionate about teaching and discipling children and youth in the gospel. Accompanying this is a growing body of research and academic study in this discipline which is supported by the International Association for the Study of Youth Ministry (IASYM).

I had the privilege of attending the *IASYM Australasian Conference* held at Ridley College on the 19th to 21st April 2018. This was my first IASYM conference and so I was a little tentative as I walked through the gates of Ridley College. But I soon found myself relaxing in the company of friendly people variously involved in youth ministry. There were around 50 attendees at the conference ranging from youth ministers at the coal face to lecturers engaged in the formal teaching and training of youth ministers, from trainees to senior ministers, from those testing out ideas for emerging research to those presenting findings of completed doctorate dissertations, from those seeking to make practical use of academic research to those inquiring about publication of their study findings, from those who travelled from as far as New Zealand to locals based in Melbourne.

So how did the conference cater for this diverse cohort? By delivering a rich program with varied presentations, the conference provided a stimulating experience for all of us. It offered three formats for engagement and interaction: research papers, emerging research and research skills workshops. The topics presented included faith and spiritual formation, the establishment and evaluation of different youth ministry programs and models, confession of sins, the Billy Graham crusades, biblical identity and identity formation, youth workers in secular spaces, pornography intervention, research skills and application,

and gender confusion and singleness. The problem for me (and I am sure for others) was what to forgo when presentations ran concurrently. I am thankful, however, that we were provided with the research papers prior to the conference so that we could engage at a deeper level and also not miss out on the presentations we were unable to attend.

Besides the variety of topics, I particularly valued the way that the program was set out. As one who is involved both in youth ministry itself, and as a lecturer in NT Greek at Youthworks College in Sydney, I appreciated the plentiful opportunities to network, especially around delightful food provided



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by the Ridley College catering team and sampled on excursions to the North Melbourne foodie scene.

Within each 90-minute session there was ample time to listen to the presentation, discuss it with other participants and interact with the presenter in an informal setting. As a presenter currently enrolled at Ridley College in the Masters of Arts (Theology) and engaged in writing a project, I am thankful for the opportunity to present my ideas and have them tested and sharpened by fellow practitioners, students and academics. In addition, the re-launching of Ridley Centre for Children and Youth Ministry by Principal, Brian Rosner, was a most timely reinforcement of the goals of this conference.

All in all, I found the IASYM conference to be immensely productive and deeply encouraging. It was moving to see how God is working in the Australasian region to grow his young people in the knowledge and love of him. It was exciting to hear the pioneering research into youth ministry and the best ways forward in the work ahead. And it is challenging to now put what we have heard into practice.



Top: Lecture and discussion session / Above: Conference Cafe Breakfast

Community of Practice

The relaunch of the **Centre for Children's and Youth Ministry** has provided a unique setting for a group of practitioners.

NEW GROUP

The Centre for Children's and Youth Ministry (CCYM) Community of Practice (CoP) had its first meetings this year. 'It's a group of youth, children's and family ministry leaders who come together to support each other and to provide a sounding board for ideas and pioneering in our field,' says Maddy Solomon, a Ridley student and member of the group. 'We can gather wisdom, and we can choose how committed to the group we want to be.'

Graham Stanton, Coordinator of the CCYM says the Community of Practice is established 'to serve the church by promoting the best possible

thinking and practice of ministry with children and young people by connecting students, expert practitioners and academic researchers. CoP is a social learning theory developed by Etienne Wenger that recognises 'learning' occurs best when people share knowledge with each other within some sort of community network and shared activity.'

To help the group understand what this means, 'the first meeting opened with a discussion on what your involvement could be,' Maddy explains. 'There is a core committed group, but there is also room for participation if you are not part of the core, or more inclined to float in and out.'



...the experienced practitioners see the benefit of interacting with others to help grow the next generation of practitioners...

This is a key difference from other groups,' she says. 'Performance is not being monitored or supervised. We come alongside each other, and can each choose our level of participation and investment.'

This type of environment supports pioneering ministry. 'As part of the group, we can be willing to take the first steps, and let others learn from our progress. Discussion is always robust, biblical and engaging, and this enables us to work out what we want to do, what we need to do it, and what works.'

A flexible level of commitment is not the only factor that makes the Community of Practice unique. 'Participants are not necessarily Anglican,' says Maddy. 'Youth leaders from other denominations attend, so we get a sense of the breadth of ministry across Melbourne, and the CoP acts as a professional peer support network. There is also a breadth of expertise. Some participants are seminary students, some have been working in youth ministry for a few years, and others for much longer. Some children's and youth ministry practitioners can become quite isolated in their roles,' says Maddy, 'but the experienced practitioners see the benefit of interacting with others to help grow the next generation of practitioners.'

A meeting focused on parents, including a presentation from a parent is Maddy's highlight so far. 'It made us think about what it is like to be a parent, and to identify family patterns that bring God into conversations with kids and disciple them.'

We want to be partnering with parents and work with them so we need to have conversations about what happens at home as well as what happens at youth group or kids' club. It reminded me that parents are only human and sometimes they need help.'

For more details on the CCYM Community of Practice, or to sign up for emails about future meetings, go to: www.ridley.edu.au/ccym



Above: Student Maddy attends the Centre for Children's and Youth Ministry (CCYM) Community of Practice (CoP).

Join the CCYM Community of Practice

Centre for Children's and Youth Ministry (CCYM) meetings are held semi-regularly on Thursday evenings on the Ridley Campus. Can be live-streamed.

MEETING DATES 2018

21 June
16 August
20 September
9 November

FIND OUT MORE:
RIDLEY.EDU.AU/CCYM