

## Book Review



***Practicing Discernment with Youth:  
A Transformative Youth Ministry Approach***

by David F. White

Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press © 2005

While youth ministry is a passion of mine, my original intent in reading this book was not bringing it to the website. However, I realized that what White proposes in this thought-provoking resource applies far more broadly than to just youth ministry.

Those who are “in the trenches” with youth will welcome his diagnosis of current youth culture and the crisis surrounding youth ministry. It will be reassuring to leaders who are doing their best, encountering frustration and burnout, and sensing opposition from many corners that their concerns are not imagined. Beyond these first two chapters of well-articulated argument lies a stimulating and reflective approach to ministry in general.

White suggests that over time the church has lost the practice of discernment. This can cause aimless floating on the latest cultural trend rather than identifying what is of God for each context. He also voices that discernment engages all aspects of our being - heart, mind, soul and strength. When we delve into discernment in all its complexity, we are answering the greatest commandment. Rather than it being a merely intellectual exercise (tempting as that may be for Presbyterians) or strictly a time of prayer, in White’s four step model senses and feelings are affirmed through listening to selves and others, a place of understanding is reached, dreams are remembered and the prophetic voices in the group are recognized, and ultimately there is movement beyond these to faithful action.

Throughout the book particularities of youth ministry are a constant thread, but this process is certainly relevant to more than them. How often do the leadership of your church (whether a staff, a session or council, or even a programming or administrative committee) deeply reflect together on previous paths tried? How often do they seek out the wisdom of the collective soul of the group, recapture the original vision of the work they are called to do and brainstorm where to go now? How often do these groups instead fall into a mindless pattern of agendas and predictable annual events that over time lose their zest and people wonder why?

There are many suggestions of activities which would enable a group to work through this process and uncover what is of importance to them now. While many of these exercises have a dramatic flavour, don’t assume that adults among you will be closed to them. Most, if not all, could be adapted to suit your needs. Even if something does not go over well, this in itself is a learning experience and point for discussion to better understand the group. White provides other tools, such as a detailed description of Lectio Divina, to help bring people back to their creative and soulful selves.

If I have whetted your appetite to consider a new ancient approach to carrying out ministry, then I hope that you will take a journey through the book. May this and other resources be tools that challenge you to consider your own practice of ministry and how the entire body can reflect the will of God for Christ's sake.

*Anne Miller*, for the Centre for Clergy Care and Congregational Health © 2006

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