

# Framing the Vision: Seeing Things New

By, Mindy Makant, Lenoir-Rhyne University

## **PRE-LESSON INFORMATION:**

### **SESSION DESCRIPTION:**

“Where there is no vision, the people will perish...” (Proverbs 29:18)

That sounds great, but how do you figure out what that vision is and get people to buy into it? This session will explore the various ways ministry with children, youth, and families fit within a congregation and will introduce you to some steps you can take and some tools you can use to guide your congregation through a process of discerning its mission for ministry with children, youth, and families.

### **LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

1. Participants will be able to identify the primary or default mode of Children, Youth and Family (CYF) ministry in their current context.
2. Participants will be able to formulate a framework for CYF ministry based on an understanding of the importance of fulfilling our baptismal promises together.
3. Participants will be able to generate a plan for doing CYF ministry that enables them to bridge the gap from where they are to where they would like their ministry to be.

### **MATERIAL NEEDED:**

1. Power point (Continuum of Ministry Models and Affirmation of Faith promises)
2. Handout: Affirmation of Faith Promises Matrix
3. Mini-lecture script

### **LESSON OVERVIEW:**

This lesson is intended to help ministry leaders both to frame a vision for ministry of those of all ages in their congregational context and to share this vision with the community's leadership. I begin the lesson by having participants focus on what their current CYF Ministry looks like. What are they doing that they like? I then offer four models of ministry and suggest that the primary role of the church – of the local community of faith – is to be a place where all the saints are given a place to grow in faith toward God and in fervent love towards one another. All ministry rightly tends towards this goal. In the mini-lecture I offer a theological and scriptural rationale for this vision. Finally, I turn to the ELW's Affirmation of Baptism and suggest that the baptismal promises already offer us a framework for CYF Ministry and suggest ways the participants can use this framework in their own settings.

Lesson:

**1. Identifying current model:**

Describe youth ministry in your context -

- a. In groups of 2 or 3 have participants discuss their CYF ministry programs. What is the one thing they would say they are most proud of? Focus on activities, not numbers. *What* do you do? Not, how many do it.
- b. In large group share highlights on the board.
- c. Using the PowerPoint slide of the continuum below, discuss various models of youth ministry. Include examples for each ministry area that are common in your context.
  - i. **Advocacy** – Ministry which focuses on standing up for or on behalf of others. For example, working with a Guardian ad litem program through which adults speak up on behalf of children who are voiceless in our court system.
  - ii. **Care** – Ministry which focuses on caring specifically for a particular population. For example, an after school program in which children are provided a snack and tutoring.
  - iii. **Companionship** – Ministry which focuses on the development of relations with children and youth. For example, mentoring programs such as Big Brother/Big Sister.
  - iv. **Equipping** – Ministry which focuses on enabling children and youth to *do* ministry. For example, the ELCA’s Young Adults in Global Mission in which young adults spend a year actively doing ministry out in the world.
- d. Discuss briefly where the participants see their CYF ministry program fitting on the continuum.

Which preposition best describes the CYF ministry program in your congregation: for, to, with, of?

**for (advocacy) ----- to (care) ----- with (companionship) ----- of (equipping)**

Make the point that all four are needed. There is a time and place for each of these. I am not suggesting we pick one over the other but that we discern what is called for in a particular context in a particular time and situation. However, I also want to suggest that CYF ministry, while attending to all four areas, should tend towards equipping.

## 2. Engaging and Equipping *All* the Saints – mini-lecture

Play the DVD of the mini-lecture, or use the script in the Appendix to present.

## 3. Re-Framing CYF Ministry

One very helpful model of engaging and equipping all the saints who gather is given to us in our Baptism.

- a. Have participants look at the ELW “Affirmation of Baptism.” (Pp slide)
- b. Divide participants into 5 groups. Give each group one of the promises from the affirmation. Within these small groups, discuss how this promise made in baptism/confirmation might shape our understanding and practice of ministry children, youth, and families. Allow adequate time for discussion.
- c. Bring the groups back together. Have each group share the key insights of their small group discussion.
- d. Relate this back to the continuum and think about where you are versus where would you like to be.
- e. Hand out a copy of the Affirmation Promises matrix. Suggest that each congregational ministry team might use such a matrix to develop their own vision for engaging and equipping the saints in their own congregations. First, identify what you are already doing in your context.
  - i. How might you fill in the gaps?
  - ii. How might you help your congregation catch this vision?
  - iii. What challenges do you anticipate?
  - iv. What opportunities most excite you?



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## **Appendix: *Engaging and Equipping All the Saints, Mini-Lecture***

Contemporary discussions surrounding ministry with children, youth, and families in the church tend to disintegrate into heated arguments over how a particular congregation is going to keep its children, youth, and young families from leaving the church. The pendulum swings (daily!) from a battle cry for entertainment intended to compete with the surrounding culture to a back-to-the-basics focus on discipline and catechetical formation. These conversations are often little more than thinly-veiled utilitarian debates over which approach works better – carrots or sticks.

The debate assumes that the presence of children, youth, and families in the life of a congregation is a good, even necessary, thing; but rarely do the debaters seriously question *why*. Ironically, this argument, is often predicated on the claim that children and youth are the church of the future – or the future of the church – an argument that tends to forget/ignore/overlook the reality that children and youth are always already an integral part of the communities to which they belong. Baptized children – regardless of age – do not need to be *made* to be an integral part of the body, but rather need to be rightly recognized and received as the members they, in fact, already are.

Iris Murdoch is a British philosopher and novelist. Murdoch suggests that we are only able to act in the world we can see. In other words, all that we do, all of our actions, reflect the way we *see* the world. The way *we* see the world. Thus, learning to see rightly matters. How we frame the world we live in determines, in a very real way, how we will act in that world. The telos, the goal, of the church – the telos of all ministry – it seems to me, is to form people with a right vision.

This necessarily raises the question of what the “right” vision is. There are a number of (very good) books written in the past few years on why the church is shrinking and particularly why youth and young adults are leaving the church. There is a tremendous temptation, as a result of this research, to develop ministry plans which act as something of a tourniquet intended to stem the flow, to stop the exodus, of folks fleeing a church that is increasingly seen as irrelevant, exclusive, and shallow. (According to the Barna Group these are three of the top reasons for the current decline in numbers.) And though I in no way mean to disparage the research that led to these findings, I do want to suggest that perhaps their focal point – a worry over the retention of children and youth in the church as an end in itself – is off a bit. In order to do this, I need you to do something with me...

Use clockwise demonstration.

In the book of Acts Paul and Silas are accused of turning the world upside down through their proclamation of the Gospel.

To focus on keeping our children and youth in the church is, I think, to get it backwards. Though it may look right side up, it is to see the world through a set of lenses that forgets that Jesus is Lord. Such a focus gives into the myth of scarcity. It invites us to believe that children, youth, and family are scarce resources and that we must compete with other communities – whether other churches, sports teams, or work – in order to survive in an increasingly hostile consumer market. But this is simply not consistent with the message of the Gospel. In fact the Gospel consistently turns our logic upside down. God has given the church all the gifts we need to be the church. Hear again the gifts of the Spirit given in baptism:

- the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
- the spirit of counsel and might,
- the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord,
- the spirit of joy in God’s presence, both now and forever.

We are charged with being faithful stewards of what God has given us, not with trying to “get” more. Thus we need a new vision; we need eyes to see both who we are and what we are called to. We need to see the world in a new way, in a way that may well feel rather upside down.

By focusing on the church as a place where we all continue to be formed into a people who grow in faith toward God and in fervent love towards one another, the church is likely to become a place where children and youth stay. But this is pure grace. A side effect, if you will, of learning to see the church rightly and thus learning to act rightly as the church.

The prophet Micah proclaims, “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (6:8) In the Gospels Jesus expounds shows us what doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God looks like. It looks like loving enemies, turning the other cheek, feeding the hungry, tending the lame. Or, in the language used in our Communion liturgy, it looks like growing in faith toward God and in fervent love towards one another.

But if growth in love is the vision, the question becomes: *how* do we grow in love? Here again we can turn to the gift of the liturgy, specifically to the baptismal promises we affirm in Confirmation. In other words, framing a vision of CYF Ministry that turns the world upside down enables all of us to grow into our baptismal promises:

- to live among God's faithful people,
- to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper,
- to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,
- to serve all people, following the example of Jesus,
- and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth

together.