

Youth Ministry Report - 2011

The year 2011 has been an eventful year for the Youth Group indeed. Below are some of the highlights of 2011 and notes of future directions.

As many of you know, our dear member Natalie Richards left in October for YWAM in Australia. Natalie is currently a part of their Compassionate Discipleship Training School (DTS). Their program is split between 3 months of Discipleship training and 10 weeks of Outreach in a third world country. Their curriculum covers core topics such as God's Nature and Character, Building and Maintaining Godly Relationships, and God's Intentions for Individuals, Peoples and Nations. Each session highlights the value of human life through the eyes of the creator, bringing the promise of hope into a broken world, and addressing issues of poverty and injustice. The Outreach phase of their program is termed "mercy oriented" and hopes to respond to poverty and inequality with God's heart. Natalie's team in particular spent 2 weeks in Toowoomba, Australia; a city that was flooded earlier this year. Now this is Natalie's first of 8 weeks in Cambodia. You can get more information from their website at, <http://ywamnewcastle.com/>.

Natalie did not decide to do this on a whim. She had been working with me on an individual basis for almost a year, praying and trying to decipher God's direction. She made the difficult decision to defer her McGill acceptance for a year, which was not an easy task, and to devote herself to a mission trip. Natalie searched hard and thought critically before taking her leap of faith. Please follow her beautiful blog at <http://natalie-richards.blogspot.com/>. Recently, Natalie taught English to a group of 3-year-olds at a government-run school, and performed skits aimed at reminding the children that they are both sought after, and loved. Please keep her in your prayers, as she truly treasures and desires this support from us.

Sunday Morning Youth Ministry, also known as SMYCH, has continued to grow and has become much more interactive! During the last months before summer 2011 we watched and discussed video seminars featuring Rob Bell. First, "The Gods Aren't Angry" examined where the idea of religion came from, where did people get the idea that an entity out there needed to be worshipped, appeased or followed? More importantly, the film moves on to consider how the idea came to be that if one didn't say, do, or offer the right things that this being would become upset or angry with you? He talks about how the Pharisees attempted to control people by triggers emotions like guilt or fear, and relates that this continues to be a struggle that we are still having in modern times. Bell finishes with a dream of how church should be experienced today, as a place where loving both God and our neighbours go hand in hand in thought and in action. We continued from there to watch his seminar titled "Everything is Spiritual", which both the members and I experienced what can be termed as, "getting our minds blown". Extremely captivating video, which we all recommend you check out. I can tell you the synopsis: *In the Hebrew scriptures there is no word for 'spiritual.' And Jesus never used the phrase 'spiritual life.' Why? Because for Jesus and his tradition, all of life is spiritual. But what does that really mean?* But as for describing just how intricate and how elegantly he tied it all together, you need

to see this video. He manages to link the scientific and spiritual realms of our existence in a way that is both engaging and simple enough to understand and in a way that sticks. Discussions that followed were lively. September brought questions regarding whether we felt as a group that continuing to use media was something that made the topics easier to absorb. Then one day something drastic happened... the DVD player decided not to work. Thus began a section of this year that can only be (humorously) titled "Give me at least 15 minutes of serious discussion or else!" which I must admit, surprisingly, has been more of a success than I ever could have imagined. We start off with a somewhat large topic (i.e. the idea of hope in the modern world, can there be joy with sorrow, etc) and the kids narrow it down to pinpoint what about the topic they find relevant and significant to them. That being said, future directions in the year 2012 we will be doing sessions centered on two books: Rob Bell titled Velvet Elvis and Blue Like Jazz by Donald Miller. We will also be watching a film series by Stewart H. Redwine and John Schimke called 36 Parables. They are the parables from the bible re-told in skits based in our modern day time in order to increase relevance, raise questions, challenge thinking, and encourage discussion. Finally, late this year we will be doing a large session on sexuality using Rob Bell's book Sex God, and the Good Sex 2.0 video curriculum by Kara Powell.

Friday night Youth Group. Yes, our numbers are quite small, there is no denying that. But our numbers are powerful, and nothing short of a gift that continues to take my breath away. The humour, the fun, and the closeness shared are only the surface of what is experienced. I can honestly say, the people that comprise the Youth Group are profoundly compassionate, intelligent, are deeply good, and share a resilient bond. This past year I have seen members support each other with wisdom beyond their age group. We are sharing life together, and that is my priority and what I am most grateful for this year. Whether watching movies with popcorn and hot chocolate (what is life without hot chocolate?), or beating each other at the Laser Quest, we share what's been going on in each others lives. Outreach-wise, I have been meeting with new, old, and non members of St Michaels on an individual basis to hopefully offer support and direction no matter what their choices regarding Youth Group or SMYCH may be. Also, Crossroads held a Youth Group Fair, where we were given a chance to share what the experience at St Michaels is like and what we offer.

Once again I would like to offer my deepest thanks and gratitude to the Parish of Saint Michaels and All Angels. Your support, guidance, and company have helped me immeasurably.

Respectfully,

Jaclyn O'Connor