



Episode 0: Introducing Disrupting Ministry

Abigail Rusert:

And w- listen, the dirty, the big, dirty secret about good youth ministry is that it's just good ministry, period. And the secret about what we've done is it's not rocket science at all. We've just put youth, youth, young people at the design tables, along with the people who are not young to figure out what churches are called to in this season and to help churches re-imagine what they're called to in this season. So, it's not as though we're helping churches design ministries that are like, 'you're going to get 25 million young people in your door if you do it this way, right?' We're, what we've done is we've said, 'no, no, no, no, no.' Take the young people who you serve, or want to serve, and pull them into the design process with you, and figure out together how the Holy Spirit is nudging you to serve Jesus afresh in your context.

Megan DeWald:

That's the Rev. Abigail Visco Rusert, Director of the Institute for Youth Ministry at Princeton Theological Seminary. For the past 25 years, the Institute for Youth Ministry has developed resources, programs, and events that are compelled by a theological vision for the Church's ministry with young people. And for our first few years, we had a lot to be optimistic about in this work, as we engaged thousands of youth ministers who were excited about what God seemed to be up to in the world. Young people were still showing up to our churches, and youth ministry organizations and leaders were cropping up all over the place to help ministry practitioners figure out how to reach them, what to teach them, and how to have fun while doing it.

But after a few years came a series of studies and reports that began to sound the alarms. Turned out, the do-good, feel-good spirituality of young people bore little resemblance to the Christian discipleship that leaders thought they were cultivating. What's more, it turned out that young people were also disengaging, or even disavowing the Church entirely.

Abigail:



And I remember all, all throughout those years, uh, most of what we had been hearing was, 'There's a fire, there's a fire. How do we put it out? How do we put it out?' Like, how do we stop the bleeding, gaping, open wound of, um, young people just leaving the church in droves? And so, a lot of our methodology has been, how do we stop? How do we stop? How do we stop? And I think that, I think that entities, like the Institute for Youth Ministry have been, um, sort of some of the, some of the energy behind how do we help the church figure this out? And, and I don't think that's a bad thing. I think it's really, really good, but what we've started to notice at the Institute for Youth Ministry is that we need to take a slightly different approach.

Megan:

Join me, Megan DeWald, Associate Director of the Institute for Youth Ministry and host of our new podcast, *Disrupting Ministry*, where we'll bring you stories of faith communities who are disrupting the status quo in the Church by developing innovative forms of ministry with young people. In our first season, we're sharing stories and learnings from the relationships and research we've developed over the past three years through a grant initiative called The Log College Project.

You'll hear more from Abigail, who developed and launched the project, as well as from Carmelle Beaugelin, who has coordinated and connected the cohort of 12 churches we've been walking alongside throughout this project.

Carmelle Beaugelin:

One of the magical things about proximity and interaction and community is that as you start to do work alongside and with, not to, but alongside and with, um, and you start to see the people that you are engaging with as, um, co-laborers in ministry, as people in equal standing in ministry, as you, you're not, you know, proselytizing to them, they're with you in the active formation of, of ministry that fosters and spreads the love of God. You see them as people.

Megan:

By using human-centered design thinking as a framework for the project, we've been able to watch the transformation of relationships and systems within these congregations. Instead of searching for the one-size-fits-all solution that will magically stem the tide of broad cultural changes, we've started with empathy,



listening alongside the churches to the people—young, old, ordained, and lay—who comprise their community and are therefore the experts of it. Once we retrained ourselves to see people anew, the opportunities for innovative youth ministry abounded, as you'll hear from our church leaders.

Rev. Beth Royalty:

It was the word innovation that really captured my attention, because this is an old church that has done things essentially the same way for at least 30 years. And it, we had just, it was so obvious that that wasn't going to work anymore, how we did it, wasn't going to be how we were going to do it. And I'm been trying to keep up with all the quick changes and morphs and ebbs and flows of the capital-C church that we're all dealing with in the past, well, since I've been ordained, really, things are just so different.

Rev. Eliseo Morales:

So, as we went forward with this project, it was really getting into to see beyond the limits that, that our culture puts on ourselves, that our parents put on ourselves, and really see what it means to follow God in our own understanding.

Michelle Robinson:

Um, ya know, a sanctuary full of young people where she just opened up, she and her sister, to the Holy Spirit just allowed God to use her and worshiped. And she would have never done that. Well, she had never done that before. And she had a week of that when we were together at Princeton. And then the following week, she's leading by example of just reckless abandonment and being in the space of worship, and worshipping.

Lisa Kaufer:

I just, I think that was really liberating, the first liberating, the first time that we heard it was, um, you know, from the, the voice of Princeton is that we expect you to fail and it's okay. And learn, we will learn from that failure and fail forward is, you know, and just, um, that is, that is not our culture. And so, you know, to, to really benefit the innovation process or the design process, um, you have to embrace that value or it doesn't work.

Abigail:



So, what if, what if the, the thing, the job, literally the description on paper, the model of youth ministry that we are employing people to do is something that maybe needs to change inside of this system? And what would it look like for an organization like the Institute for Youth Ministry to address that?

Megan:

From the Institute for Youth Ministry at Princeton Theological Seminary, join us as we reimagine this entire vocation, allowing ourselves to dream and scheme together about *Disrupting Ministry*.