Connecting with Teenagers and Kids During a Pandemic

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Growing up in Texas, I was always a huge Blue Bell ice cream fan. You can’t be from Texas and not love Blue Bell ice cream. It is simply part of your life. It is always front page news when Blue Bell releases a new flavor. So imagine how our world was turned upside down the day the Blue Bell factory shut down. We felt like our world had suddenly come crashing down and life as we knew it would cease to exist.

As the Church we find ourselves in a unique situation, we feel like our world has come crashing down and life will never be the same. In 30 plus years of ministry I have never experienced a change in the Church as we are seeing now. Change, as we know, can be frightening for many, and a quick change becomes immediately overwhelming. That creates, for those of us who shepherd people, some challenges but also some amazing opportunities. For children and youth workers, it can be an especially exciting time. We are forced out of the box we have created around ministry and get to not only dream and create, but truly trust God.

I don’t know what will work, and I have no special secret but I want to share a few ways we can encourage and disciple and connect with kids and teenagers during this time.

Up Your Social Media Game.... Like YESTERDAY

Relationships Matter. This is always true in ministry, ALL of ministry is relational. Now, as people are separated and isolated, this truth becomes even more important. So how do we cultivate relationships with people when we can’t have contact with them? For teenagers, this is fairly easy. Are you on social media? They are. If you want to find them, find out what their preferred social media is and give yourself a crash course on how to use it. Then get on there, follow them, comment on their pictures, send them direct messages. Then use that platform for discipleship. Live video is a resource many churches are capitalizing on now. It is fairly simple to use, you only need your phone. It doesn’t have to be a lesson or sermon. Send a 60 second video asking about their day, tell a joke or have them create videos. Then saturate yourself in their social media world. We honestly should have been doing this for years, so let’s catch up.

Other tools such as Facetime, Google Hangout, Zoom, and Group-Me all offer new ways to connect and build relationships. During this time the kids would love to hear from you in real-time so capitalize on this (with parental permission/awareness, of course).

Most children are not on social media, but their parents are. Connect with kids, through parents. This allows you to keep cultivating relationships while empowering parents to disciple their kids (which we should be doing anyway). Give them a weekly challenge and teach it each day in a new way, again with a video or handout. I encourage you to strategize how you will do this. I have something specific to send out everyday and I send it via email, then post it to our social media (i.e. Monday is a short lesson, Tuesday is an activity corresponding with the lesson, etc…). I have also created weekly Bible sheets with verses to look up and read and
questions to answer. I have asked the kids to print them out and complete them and then bring them to church when we meet again for a prize (don’t be afraid of bribery...it is your friend).

**Set the Box on Fire**

New circumstances require new ideas. Will they work? We don’t know. But if it furthers the Kingdom and helps our students and families grow in faith, it is probably worth a try. Dream. What have you always wanted to do in ministry? Now might be the time to try it. There are no rules really at this point.

As a church, our question is always, “How do we serve our community? How do we meet their needs and show them Jesus?” One of my favorite ideas to come out of this is virtual tutoring. We have trained and background checked college students. We have set up a care line where parents/caregivers can call and arrange for a virtual tutor. They will be matched with a college student who will set up a schedule for tutoring. This shows our community we care, but also allows students to grow in sanctification by serving others and keeps them engaged with the church and community. I hope to expand this to my high school students soon, allowing them to tutor younger kids.

Another idea we are trying is “Easter Egg Hunt From Your Car”. Our Easter egg hunt every year draws in hundreds from our community. We knew we wanted to continue that in some way if possible. But with restrictions in place, we had to get creative. So we will hide 95 eggs around our campus. We will have families drive in, they will get a map, and mark on the map the eggs they see from their car. Then they will add up the eggs and go to the “candy station”. Each kid will get a bag of candy (prepared under CDC guidelines) and if they are within 10 of the 95 number, they will get an extra prize.

Think about your context. How can you reimagine church to reach your community while keeping kids and families involved and growing in faith?

**Relax**

For real...relax. You can’t do it all and you shouldn’t. It's easy to get overwhelmed by what others are doing. Each church and community and context is unique. Do what YOU do, use your unique gifts. Stop comparing yourself to others. Don’t suddenly try to be someone you are not. Teenagers want authenticity, be yourself. Your students and kids simply want to know you are there for them. Love them well, pray for them, shoot them a text to say “have a great day,” it doesn’t have to be complicated.

When the Blue Bell factory opened up again, it wasn’t the same, it was actually better. Church has changed, probably forever. The thing we have always done won’t work now. We can complain about that or we can work to find what does. I believe this is a great time in Church history. We get to be part of God doing a new thing, and we have to fully trust him. No longer can we rely on ourselves or our experience. The Holy Spirit goes before us and prepares a way
for us, we simply follow. Stay faithful, stay close to Jesus, love people well and we will do more than survive this, we will see the light of Jesus in places and platforms we never have. Go, make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. You can do this. And while you’re out, grab some ice cream.