

Editorial: *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, Twenty Years Later

TIMOTHY PAUL JONES



Timothy Paul Jones oversees online learning and teaches in the areas of family ministry and

apologetics. Before coming to Southern, he led churches in Missouri and Oklahoma as pastor and associate pastor. Dr. Jones has received the Scholastic Recognition Award and has authored or contributed to more than a dozen books, including *Conspiracies and the Cross: Perspectives on Family Ministry*; and, *Christian History Made Easy*. In 2010, Christian Retailing magazine selected *Christian History Made Easy* as the book of the year in the field of Christian education. He is married to Rayann and they have three daughters: Hannah, Skylar, and Kylinn. The Jones family serves in SojournKids children's ministry at Sojourn Community Church.

Family-Based Youth Ministry was the first family ministry book I ever read.

My first response was to reject family ministry as an utterly ridiculous and impractical idea in my context.

It took two years for the struggles of ministry and the work of the Spirit to change my mind.

"I DON'T SEE ANY WAY THAT THIS COULD WORK HERE"

In 2002, I was called to oversee children's ministry and Christian education in a growing church. I had spent the previous three years as this congregation's youth minister; now, in addition to my other roles, I oversaw the new youth minister. A few months after the new youth minister arrived, he came into my office carrying a book with a cover that would have looked trendy a decade earlier.

"I've been reading this book," he said, "and I really think we need to look into trying family-based ministry. This is what our students need." He held up his copy of *Family-Based Youth Ministry* and began outlining what he had

FAMILY-BASED YOUTH MINISTRY

REVISED AND EXPANDED



Mark DeVries

learned.

“Well, I really like what you’re describing,” I said once he had finished. “And that’s the way things *should* be done in youth ministry. The problem is, in this church, two-thirds of our students come from broken homes, and we just don’t have enough intact homes to support this. I’ll take a look at the idea, but I don’t see any way that this could work here.”

Once the youth minister finished the book, he passed it on to me. I read a few bits and pieces of *Family-Based Youth Ministry* and then shelved it. I had completed a bachelor’s degree in biblical studies, a master of divinity, and a doctorate in educational leadership—but I had never read a book about family ministry. As such, I did find the book enlightening. Still, I knew this model would never succeed in my context. If God ever called me to serve in an upper-income suburban church, I might use this book—but not here, not in this low-income exurban neighborhood, blighted with methamphetamine labs and abandoned trailer homes. When I was the youth minister, I had tried intergenerational activities with mixed success, but I wasn’t willing to turn these ideas into a ministry-wide strategy.

NEW ROLE, NEW CHALLENGES, NEW OPENNESS

A year or two later, much had

changed. Our church’s context was the same as it had been for decades, but I had recently transitioned into the role of senior pastor. Looking at the church from this new angle, I was concerned as I saw fault lines emerging between generations. What’s more, the church had continued to grow, and it was becoming clear that the ministry staff needed help to be able to disciple people effectively.

One of the many factors that came together that year for me was the recognition that God designed the family to make disciples and model Christ’s love for his church. I began to look at the church’s ministries from that perspective, and I remembered a book that I had shelved the year before. At the same time, I began an academic bridge program at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to turn my doctor of education degree into a doctor of philosophy degree. These seminars provided a context to wrestle with emerging ideas about church leadership.

Over the next three years in that church, I began to implement more and more family ministry practices. As I learned to reflect more effectively on my ministry, these ideas became increasingly rooted in my study of Scripture and theology. By the end, many of the practices were the very ones that metamorphosed into the family-equipping ministry model

described in *Perspectives on Family Ministry* and *Family Ministry Field Guide*. In the beginning, however, most of my ideas came from *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, the very book that I had shelved as impractical a couple of years earlier. As I've conversed with hundreds of family ministry veterans over the past eight years, I have discovered that I am not alone. For many of us, *Family-Based Youth Ministry* was our first introduction to family ministry.

Family-Based Youth Ministry, Twenty Years Later

This year is the twentieth anniversary of the first printing of *Family-Based Youth Ministry*. We've chosen to commemorate this anniversary with a couple of significant research articles focused on ministry to adolescents ("Adolescent Moral Development in Christian Perspective" and "The Function of Short-Term Mission Experiences in Christian Formation"), as well as an interview with Mark

DeVries and a few appreciative reflections on the impact of *Family-Based Youth Ministry*. In addition to these features, this issue also includes a broad range of research articles and brief reflections on family discipleship and Christian formation.

Beginning with this issue, *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* will be made available free of charge here: <http://www.sbts.edu/resources/publications/journal-of-discipleship-and-family-ministry/>. If you prefer a printed journal, don't despair! Print-on-demand versions will continue to be available, and—if you have subscribed to *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry*—we will fulfill your entire subscription.

Timothy Paul Jones, Ph.D.
C. Edwin Gheens Professor of
Christian Family Ministry
The Southern Baptist Theological
Seminary