



tips for youth workers

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EMBRACING THE NEW NORMAL – by Major Terence Hale, Territorial Youth Secretary

We now find ourselves at the beginning of a new season of ministry to children and youth in the territory. In days gone by we would say that it is the beginning of a new program year, but with a shift in our focus from program to mission and outcomes, I would encourage us all to refer to our seasons in a new way to match our transforming perspective. New language for a new normal.

No matter the language we use, I hope we are all excited, and busy working toward creating CHRIST-centred; OTHERS-focused disciples in these days. Though, we would all acknowledge that it is not just our language that we need to change but also a vast array of other aspects as well as we embrace a new season of ministry within a COVID-19 reality.

This reality, that we must be careful to admit is about far more than just the social constraints of actively living during a global pandemic, and includes societal pressures concerning fear, isolation, uncertainty, instability, injustice, racial tensions, and more, form the much discussed but rarely defined new normal. The *new normal* is an elusive entity that changes shape and form. Some have claimed to have *captured* it quite early on in our season of change while many others, perhaps most of us, seem to be actively chasing it, catching only fleeting glimpses of our quarry in all too rare moments of clarity.

I want to take a few moments to talk about the new normal. I am not going to be audacious enough to claim I know the new normal for children and youth ministry in our territory down to the nuts and bolts of daily ministry, and I don't think it would be wise to try and define it to that level. There is a lot to say on this, more than one entry can cover, so I want to offer some broad strokes and hopefully form a foundation that will help us all excel in our own ministry contexts in the days ahead.

These are significant days. We are writing history; for better or worse, people will look back and remember what the church did in these days. With that in mind, I want to suggest three elements to form the foundation of the new normal for us. With a solid foundation in place we can then build in keeping with the heart and mind of God.

1. Worship as the New Normal

As we move forward, we need to embrace worship as the new normal. As you consider what your ministry to children and youth will look like I want to challenge you to make worship the new normal of both your personal life and the ministry you lead or engage in. Why worship? Because worship connects the heart of the Father with the longing of our souls. Worship transcends our circumstances while never negating them, at the same time bringing fulfillment and perspective that is only possible through the Spirit of God that connects the heavenly and earthly in our lives.

In Psalm 42 we meet a Psalmist who is dealing with uncertainty, unwanted change, and adversity in his life. But in the face of it all he reminds his soul that the key is to worship God despite the circumstances. We see these words first in Psalm 42:5,

“Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,

for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.”

The Psalmist speaks truth to his soul and reminds himself to trust in God despite the circumstances. This is what a heart of worship accomplishes in our lives: it brings the truth of God to bear upon us. If we want a stabilizing force to guide all our efforts, both our successes and failures, we should make worship the new normal for us, as we face change in how we do ministry. Can we have a Matthew 6:33 attitude and seek first the Kingdom of God, or in other words, worship, and then to know that all other things will be added unto us?

2. Evangelism as the New Normal

Over the past several months I have spent a lot of time running; training for a half marathon was one of my #CovidGoals. My regular running route takes me through one of the most upscale neighbourhoods in all the country with gated estates, security, and absolutely massive homes. As I would run through that neighbourhood, often feeling very hot and thirsty, I would wonder what it would be like to be able to go into one of these homes and see what they are like on the inside and perhaps have a drink of water. But I knew that I would not be welcome - I didn't belong there, and these homes were off limits to me.

This made me think of how we as believers hold the keys to the most desirable reality - the Kingdom of God. But are we welcoming? Would others on the outside get a sense that they are more than welcome to come in? In these days when people are realizing their thirst for God, are we busy letting people know they are welcome to come and find fulfillment in Christ? We must be weary of becoming comfortable in our Kingdom reality and forgetting the lost that wander by outside. If the preaching of the Gospel and the redemption of the lost is not the primary goal of all our ministry, we are in need of a spiritual check up. We need to take Paul's words from Acts 20:24 to heart. He says, "However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace."

Can evangelism be the new normal for children and youth ministries in the days ahead?

3. Holiness as the New Normal

Finally, I would like to suggest that we make holiness the new normal. Holiness is what makes both worship and evangelism possible. I would hope that our hearts would be stirred by the words of song,

“For thy mission make me holy,
For thy glory make me thine,
Sanctify each moment fully,
Fill my life with love divine.”

In Isaiah 30:15-30, we are reminded that holiness is key to peace, purpose, and planning in days of uncertainty. It is only as we seek holiness of living by acknowledging the holiness of the Father that we are able to know and hear. Will you allow the holiness of God to invade your life so that you may know the mercy and mind of God and hear His voice?

Verse 21 reminds that when we acknowledge the holiness of God, whether we turn to the right or the left, we will hear a voice saying, "This is the way; walk in it." Later in verse 30 it says that God will cause people to hear his "majestic voice." What a great pair of promises! What a great provision for these days!

Worship, evangelism, and holiness. Can these foundational elements of Christian faith and practice be what constitutes the new normal for us as we continue into sometimes uncharted territory with our children and youth ministries in the days ahead?

These days are ripe with both challenge and potential, and I would like to encourage us all to step boldly into the new normal and to set the parameters of this normal from foundations of worship, evangelism and holiness. May God lead us into the new normal, and may God find us faithful!