

**EVERYDAY YOUTH MINISTRY**



## A Youth Ministry Volunteer Speaks His Mind

...At Least What's Left of It

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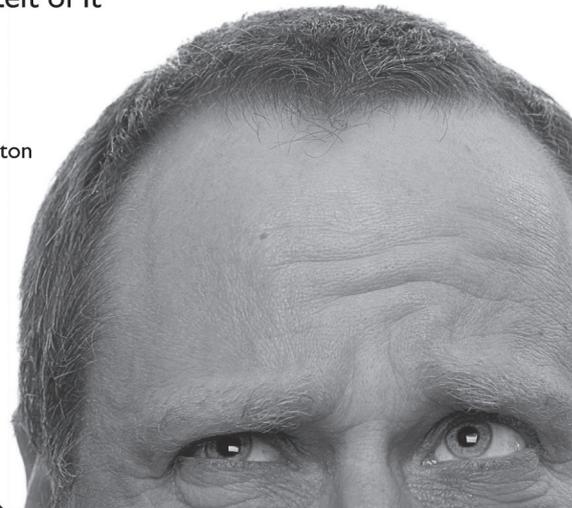


# A YOUTH MINISTRY VOLUNTEER SPEAKS HIS MIND...

At Least What's Left of It

BY RICK WILLIAMS

foreword by Kurt Johnston



AN EVERYDAY YOUTH MINISTRY  
RESOURCE FROM SIMPLY YOUTH MINISTRY

:: THE VOICE OF THE IN-THE-TRENCHES YOUTH WORKER

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this book to my wonderfully supportive wife, Melissa, and my children, Daniel, Felicia, and Deanna, for sharing their father with thousands of other kids over the years.

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# FOREWORD

Rick Williams is my hero, and I don't use that word very often.

I first met Rick when I was a sophomore in high school and he was in his early 20s, serving as the volunteer leader of the junior high department of our church. Long before I felt a calling to junior high ministry, I admired Rick from a distance as I watched him tirelessly serve the kids in our church that most people seemed to ignore.

Several years later when I became the church's first paid junior high pastor, Rick was asked to hand the reigns to me. He gave me the keys to the kingdom he had built and surrounded me with his support for the next six years.

When I felt like God was moving me to a new season of ministry, in a new church, the leadership asked Rick if he would be willing to resume his role as the volunteer leader...of the group he built...that was handed to a whipper-snapper...who was now heading

to greener pastures. He agreed, and led the ministry for the next TWENTY years!

According to my calculations, Rick has been a volunteer youth worker leading MASSIVE chunks of ministry for around 35 years. I'm not sure what makes somebody a hero in your book, but it's near the top of the list in mine.

Our friendship is a long and rich one, and I'm a better youth worker because he's allowed his youth worker mojo to rub off on me.

In this book, Rick talks candidly (and sometimes painfully) to those of us heading up the youth department at the church. It's as if he's the spokesperson for the thousands of thousands of volunteers serving alongside us...and he's whispering some of their thoughts into our ears. Even though that sounds a bit creepy, I hope you'll be willing to listen up.

Rick Williams. Youth ministry volunteer extraordinaire. Sage. Ear whisperer. Hero. But mostly...friend.

***Kurt Johnston***

# INTRODUCTION

Some years ago, Gallup released a U.S. poll of the 18 most admired people of the 20th century, and even though you could guess some of the people that made the list, I was quite surprised at who did not make the list. Of course Mother Teresa was on the top of the list, followed by Martin Luther King Jr. and JFK at numbers two and three. Billy Graham made the list at number seven, but I was surprised that not one of the top 18 most-admired people was a youth pastor.

OK, I wasn't really surprised, but it got me thinking: If I had created the list, I would have put youth pastors in the top five or six. You may think I am kidding, but I really admire the choice people make when they decide to go into youth ministry. It is a seemingly endless job, and let's face it—you do not do it for the money. I studied youth ministry in college but decided to enter the corporate world for my career. However, I have been a youth ministry volunteer for the past 30-plus years in a couple of different churches in Whittier, California, a town about 30 miles east of Los Angeles.

I have worked with about 15 different youth pastors (I volunteered with Kurt Johnston for six years in the late '80s and early '90s...back when he had hair!) and have realized that no two are the same. Some were

incredibly suited for the job; some, not so much. They all had differing styles of ministry and different levels of commitment, but I have come to realize one thing: I have learned something from every one of them, and I feel incredibly blessed to have served with them all.

OK, enough of the love fest. Even though I admire youth pastors, sometimes they make some odd decisions. Sometimes they work against their volunteer staff or refuse to let volunteers help to the full extent of their capabilities, and most of the time they do not realize that there is a problem at all. I hope that your volunteers feel comfortable coming to you to talk about youth ministry issues and that they can safely tell you when they feel things should be changed. The fact is that most volunteers find it easier talking to each other about ministry deficiencies than bringing them to the lead youth pastor. They feel it is not their place or they do not want to rock the boat, maybe because they do not have a sense of ownership of the ministry. In most cases, if your volunteer staff is not talking with you about ministry problems, they are talking with each other.

So since you may not be hearing this stuff from your team of volunteers, you can hear it from me. I

certainly don't speak on behalf of every youth ministry volunteer, but my thoughts probably reflect some of theirs. So here we go—a youth ministry volunteer speaks his mind, or at least what's left of it!

# **CHAPTER 1:**

## **IF THE SACRED COW IS ON LIFE SUPPORT, WHY DON'T WE JUST PULL THE PLUG?**

I have enjoyed working with incredibly creative youth pastors and staff. I am amazed at what we have created to make a message entertaining and relevant or an event successful. But it seems that in every youth group that I have worked in, and with every youth pastor I have worked for, there are the “sacred cows” of ministry—either events that are scheduled or things that we always do that really don’t work. I realize that some of these were in place before you showed up as the youth pastor and that you were told “this is what we do”—or maybe you had an incredible revelation a few years ago about a really cool thing to do, but it has lost its effectiveness. The fact remains that you may be holding on to things that are limiting your ministry.

I don’t really know how it happens, but sometimes some of the things we do in youth ministry take on an unhealthy reverence. We place more importance on the event than on the results from the event. We do things solely because it’s the way we have always done them, without really assessing if they still work.

It is not just our youth groups that suffer from this phenomenon. Look at the church where you serve. I’m sure that you have asked the question (usually

to yourself) “Why do we do that?” Your church likely does things that seem to have no rhyme or reason or purpose, but any efforts to eliminate them face incredible resistance. The problem with most churches and youth groups is that we do not take the time to really reflect on our past events with an open, honest, “nothing is sacred” attitude, so we continue to do the same old things.

My suggestion is to get together with some of your volunteers and ask the important questions about each and every thing you do. When you assemble your feedback group, make sure that you invite “Debbie Downer” or “Donnie Downer”—the volunteers that never seem to have anything good to say. They can be an important part of getting good feedback because many of your volunteers will either be afraid to speak up against the sacred activities or will not care what you do. (Remember to invite God to the meeting, too, of course; God seems to have a good angle on what will work in the future.)

Try to get honest answers to the following questions: Why did we do that? Did it work the way we planned? Is there a better way we can reach teenagers? Remember that your entire group of students will be

totally different every two to four years, so make sure that you change with the times. If the sacred cow is on life support, pull the plug for your group's sake.

**CHAPTER 2:  
DON'T BE AFRAID  
TO LISTEN TO  
NEW IDEAS  
(YOURS WEREN'T  
ALWAYS SO  
GOOD)**