

reach out and outreach

by Rick Jordan, CBFNC Church Resources Coordinator

Youth ministry is changing with the times. The days when church on Sunday mornings, Sunday nights, and Wednesday nights had no competition are long gone, of course.

“We’re seeing our Wednesday evening programs suffering because sports, dance, and homework all have taken over Wednesday nights,” says Bryan Moore, minister of youth and students at First, Southern Pines. “We still get our middle-schoolers who can’t drive, but we miss many of our high schoolers. There’s nothing you can do about today’s schedules. The student can’t miss a baseball game or not go to a club meeting or get a failing grade.”

The youth miss coming to church too, so they are in a dilemma. Bryan continued, “About four years ago, some of them said to me, ‘We hate this, but what can we do?’ When I asked my youth when we could get together, they said, ‘Early in the mornings.’” The youth council talked about it and got the new program started. Bryan now leads a 30-minute devotional before school, three mornings each week for three different groups of youth. The youth meet at fast food restaurants. After check-in, a youth reads from a devotional book and they pray. “Some of the youth aren’t from our church, so it is also outreach.”

Since the start of the school year, ten teenagers have joined the youth group. On days they are not meeting, the youth continue their devotional readings. “They bring their devotional books to the prayer time and I see they’ve written notes in the margins. On days we are not together, I send text messages, ‘Did you read the devotional? It helped me today.’”

Dane Martin, youth minister at Ardmore, Winston-Salem, faces the same challenges. How do you disciple youth off campus? He says, “In addition to ‘church type’ involvement we get into the real world of our students. We walk with students and support what they are doing at school and in their other activities.” Volunteers from Ardmore lead morning devotions during the week. “Each small group is a little different because of the adult who leads, but similar things include check-in time for students to share about how they are doing; short devotion/reflection; opportunity for the students to

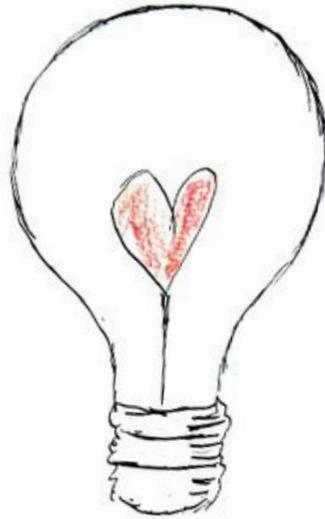
respond with their thoughts and opinions; and closing prayer. Students are able to see how their faith is not a switch they turn off and on, but something that is always on. This has also provided a platform for students to invite their friends — churched or unchurched, they are all welcome.” One young man had never connected to a church or a youth group. His family situation is very complicated and unsettled. A friend from Ardmore, Winston-Salem, invited him to attend the devotion one week. He came and felt welcomed. He listened to what was said and something seemed to stick. He continued to come to the small group each week.

Dane says, “Before too long, he decided to attend a youth retreat. Now he is a regular at church, not just this small group, and something is different about him. Despite the turmoil that might be happening at home, he seems to have a joy about himself that wasn’t seen earlier.”

Ted Duncan, associate pastor at First, Bryson City, also encouraged a weekly meeting for high school girls with an adult lay leader. They meet at a bakery every Thursday at 7:30am before school. Maggie Burns, one of the youth, says, “This group has provided a measure of consistency for me in my own faith, and has provided me with multiple accountability partners and strong friendships that I can lean on in hard times. I have also been able to form a strong relationship with our mentor, Robyn, who is an amazing example of a woman of faith. She provides us with ample amounts of wisdom and always loves us. I am beyond thankful for this group.”

To Ted, discipleship is broader than a weekly program. For example, as the youth group was planning their summer beach retreat, a student realized that it would take place the same week as her volleyball camp in Tennessee. She wrestled with this decision for two weeks. If she didn’t go to camp, she couldn’t play on the school team. She didn’t want to abandon her team or her church. Ted says, “After a couple of weeks, she pulled me aside with this burden. I told her, ‘Look, if you go to the volleyball camp, you be the best Christian witness you can

be there. You can be faithful to God by being there and not at church camp.’ You have to give them permission to miss church, but also give a challenge to be faithful wherever they are. That’s what I really try to emphasize, not a program but a life challenge. It’s an attitude. It’s harder to measure. The easy measure is attendance numbers. But it is still a good ministry if they are faithful where they are. It’s a balance of both. We’ve got to gather together to encourage one another, but we don’t live in the four walls of the church.”



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