



Diary of a roving youth minister

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In which one such pilgrim records a month's worth of the blessings and travails of daily Christian service, and in which he demonstrates for us his theology in action.

Sunday 1

Get up early to give the final adjustments to (i.e. write the rest of) a talk for a youth group. The talk goes well, and then I drive to meet Mandy (my wife) and the kids at home church. Then back with friends from church for a long lunch. Snatch some time to give the final, final adjustments to the talk before I preach at another church. At the end of the day, watch a TV program about an evangelistic mission in Newcastle. Could we do that in Sydney—or is it just my appetite for the mega-event?

Monday 2

Day off. I drive the girls, Liana and Jemimah, to school then continue with Mandy and my son Oscar to enjoy a coffee in our favourite café. As the double-shot latte takes its effect, I still feel a bit flat. It could be the adrenaline letdown—or maybe I just need more coffee.

Tuesday 3

Admin Tuesday: emails, planning, paperwork. Mark some youth ministry essays, and then lunch with a friend to talk theology, the universe and everything. Drive down to Youthworks College to give a lecture on delivering a Bible talk. I can't help but hear John Chapman in my head, as I walk them through the steps: state, explain, illustrate, and of course, apply. Every two weeks I spend an hour lecturing ministry skills, to supplement the 30-hour intensive course I lectured in February.

Wednesday 4

Drowning in a sea of admin—today it's the TWIST Music Conference we're planning. Organizing these events provides a great opportunity to train and support many people in the one hit, even though the planning can take time.

At lunchtime I visit Liana's school class to tell them about my job. I make it sound nice and simple—ministers tell people about God and love them like Jesus does. Unlike Jesus, we also answer emails.

Thursday 5

Meet the other three Youthworks youth ministry trainers for our monthly meeting. Share, pray, and discuss this month's youth ministry book. Today it's the draft of Ken Moser's new book ... and he joins us for the critique. Prompts an interesting discussion about how Acts is a model for youth evangelism. Finish day with encouraging dinner with a youth minister. Since this is gospel work, the diet can start tomorrow.

Friday 6

I spend first half of day in computer training course. Then off to Platform 7,

a new after-school ministry for school years 10-12 in the city. Each week, I design the one-hour program, and run some segments. It keeps me fresh in youth ministry, and helps students reach their friends with the gospel. The group has grown from 60 to 100 in its first term, with students from 26 schools all over Sydney. It also provides a valuable opportunity for youth leaders: an example of a youth group that is Bible-centred and enjoyable.

Home for dinner, then back out to help lead Youth Surge, a quarterly regional youth event. Great opportunity to catch up with the youth ministers from my region.

Sunday 8

Off to church with the family, then back home for lunch with a youth minister and his family. More opportunities for youth ministry

Thursday 12

Early meeting to plan next term's Platform 7 program. Then a meeting to discuss our computer database. Lunch with a volunteer youth minister during his lunch hour. His church is typical: a handful of youth and only a few leaders. My role is to give advice on leadership and programming issues, and importantly, to encourage him to persevere. After dinner, work on talk for Saturday morning.

Friday 13

Met with seven ministry peers for what we call PACT (Post-After College Training). After three years together in a regular group, we decided to continue meeting quarterly. We study the Bible, pray, eat and then swim together. After lunch, discuss the place of emotion in our Christian experience. Then off to Platform 7.

Saturday 14

Off to deliver training session at RICE leader's training day. RICE (Rice Inter Church Evangelism) is an annual evangelistic drive by 25 Asian churches in Sydney. I speak on 'Dual-Action Edification', and propose that the trend of removing evangelism from Christian gatherings is out of step with the way that Jesus builds his church. I encourage them to design the RICE event to encourage the Christian youth, and that will be a powerful testimony to the many outsiders they bring to hear God's word (like in 1 Corinthians 14). Back home to drive to the Blue Mountains for the weekend with the family and friends.

Sunday 15

Around 15 years ago, I started going away each June long weekend with fellow youth leaders at my church. This weekend, I continue the tradition, meeting with the leaders and the ever-growing mob of children. Many of us are in full-time Christian ministry, and the rest are going strong as Christians in the workplace or the home. It's encouraging to see God working, and to reflect upon the ways that he is using us. Great time relaxing with these important friends.

Monday 16

Slow morning. Leave after lunch to visit Mandy's parents and then enjoy dinner with my grandparents. Home for couch potato session in front of TV. Surprisingly invigorated in preparation for two crazy weeks before holidays.

Tuesday 17

Sit down to plan the week when I'm interrupted by the phone. Speak to a minister seeking advice on restructuring his youth ministry. Rush to meet a youth minister to swap ideas and encouragement. Then lunch with a youth leader from a charismatic church to discuss promoting an 'interdenominational' evangelistic event he is organizing. We discuss unity of the body of Christ, and how we differ on revelation and eschatology. Did I speak the truth in love, or just proliferate denominational differences? Back home, a minister calls who offers me a job at his church. Politely decline, but not without temptation. There are many aspects of 'normal' ministry that I miss ... but for now I'm in the right place. Planning meeting after dinner for TWIST.

Wednesday 18

I begin redesigning the training section of the www.youthworks.net website before its new launch. Youth

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coaching as we discuss the ins and outs of his youth program. Then off to a church to give a sermon for the tenth time. It feels like a nightmare. I skip the opening prayer, miss an important point and then it goes downhill from there. Turns out no one noticed: they were thankful that the gospel was preached clearly. God knows how to keep me humble!

Wednesday 11

A mammoth all-day staff meeting with other Youthworks trainers planning the next five years. Inspired by the Sydney Anglican Diocesan Mission, we ask how we can multiply our training sixfold. After dinner, up late marking a pile of essays.

minister phones and invites me to conduct a customized training session at his church.

Off to meet an MTS apprentice specializing in youth ministry. Explain the Youthworks youth ministry philosophy, emphasizing that youth leaders need to spend time discipling the youth entrusted to them, and train them to bring their friends to a group that gathers around the word of God in an enjoyable and appropriate way. Then I tailor some advice on how this strategy looks on the ground, and work out with him how to restructure.

Back home for more website joy, which continues far too long after dinner.

Thursday 19

Wake up from dream about websites. Back in front of the computer until afternoon. Assure myself that spending time on this website is strategic for youth and children's ministry. A journalist calls, wanting to know about the growth in youth numbers throughout Sydney churches. I wish someone had given me media training. Head out for afternoon walk with my girls, and try to stop thinking about the things I should and shouldn't have said to the journalist. After dinner, sit down with laptop to do more work, but brain shutdown leads to watching trashy TV.

Friday 20

Up early to prepare Platform 7 program and email it to the leaders. Today's session includes 'Who wants to be a Millionaire' Bible trivia game, so I prepare my best gameshow host impersonation. Sit at computer to try and finish the website (I fail), then into the city for Platform 7.

Back home for dinner, then out to speak at a youth group on 'Sex and Relationships and the Bible'. I speak from Song of Songs chapter 4—the best book to go to when it comes to God and sex.

Late night 'debrief' with Benny who's staying with us from Melbourne.

Saturday 21

The alarm awakens me at 4.30am to take Benny to the airport. We enjoy a chat in the airport lounge, then home to take my kids to Maccas for breakfast. Then to a youth conference review meeting. What do you do with 4000 feedback forms? Overall, a good response from the delegates to two great weekends of ministry. Home to entertain friends who have dropped in, then powernap to try and recover sleep.

Did I speak the truth in love, or just proliferate denominational differences?

Tuesday 24

Head off to the Australian Institute of Ministry (AIM) Training Day, where American pastor Kent Hughes speaks about the importance of preparing well for preaching. Everyone I speak to feels the rebuke of skimping on preparation. The tyranny of time! Attend a great workshop by Russell Powell, a journalist with ABC NewsRadio, on how to interview, then home to mark essays.

Wednesday 25

Day two of AIM day, then home to spend afternoon marking more essays. Doesn't feel like frontline training, but it is an essential part of shaping youth leaders through the lectures. Evening off as I start to feel flu-like symptoms ...

Thursday 26

Full day of marking. Must get it done by 5pm! The pile of assignments is a 'Field Work Summary', where the

students reflect on how their theological training has influenced their first semester's ministry. I'm wonderfully encouraged to see the students thinking hard about how they serve. They reflect honestly about trials and joys of ministry, and how they are trying to practice the theology they've learned. Another quiet night in front of TV as my sneezes become ominous.

Friday 27

Flu has arrived. Hoped to make some progress preparing for a paper I'm presenting at the Ridley College Youth Ministry Conference in Melbourne. Unfortunately my body has shut down and I spend most of the day sleeping. Fight symptoms to take family out to celebrate the start of school holidays.

Saturday 28

Mandy graciously allows me to sleep in to get better for our holidays. I've grown to expect illness around the start of holidays. It's funny how the body shuts down when we move from a period of hard work to a period of rest. Afternoon sleep, then some signs of recovery lead me to the computer to try and empty my inbox. It's interesting to see how few formal courses I've run this month. That's the ebb and flow of the job: sometimes I'm running two courses a week, other times its more informal training.

Head for bed. My dreams are filled with the next two weeks in Queensland with the family, and all the things that await my return. **B**

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