

Canada Conference 2023 Building Discipleship Paths

Introduction: The statistics show that the UPCI, compared to other denominations excel at evangelism, primarily through church planting, Global Missions and our local church culture of soul-reaching church services teaching bible studies. We are however, still struggling with retention and discipleship.

What is the rite of passage moment in North America when teens transition from the youth phase of life into adulthood?

- Here's the foundational problem: We have no rite of passage into adulthood in North America.
- The Jewish Culture has the Bar Mitzvah.
- In the South Pacific nation of Vanuatu on Pentecost Island, there is a practice where boys literally dive into manhood.
- Rather than defining and bringing our youth into adulthood, we delay it.
- *"Most children never know when they become adults."* (Wayne Rice)
- **Do you remember the day you became an adult member of your church?**
- Our children and new believers need discipleship paths, paths that will bring people to apostolic maturity.

Discipleship Path: A faith journey that begins with every person's starting line (toddler or new attender) and ends with everyone's finish line, heaven.

- A successful discipleship path will grow a person's relationship with God, join them to the Body of Christ, and reveal their Kingdom purpose.
- Discipleship paths empower people to be apostolic in doctrine, distinction, and power.
- **A discipleship path will not be successful in if it's not defined.**
- Rather than constructing marked discipleship paths to spiritual maturity and ministry, we tend to go week to week, activity to activity, without communicating the process people are in
- **We talk about flight, but we abandon them on the runway.**
- Nobody told them **how** or **when** to put away childish things.
- Where there are no discipleship paths youth leaders spend most of their time trying to prevent a mass adolescent exodus from their church.
- Where there are no discipleship paths, churches have a revolving door situation, they can't retain people who go so far as to have an Acts 2 experience.
- **We have an opportunity to leave a legacy in our churches.** We can prayerfully build discipleship paths from pre-k to children's ministry, to Jr. High ministry, to Senior High, into adulthood!

3 Ideas

1. Plan to Hand Tailor Your Discipleship Journey

Questions to ask when developing your curriculum.

- What is our mission?
- How do we equip our children and new attenders to live our mission through teaching?
- Where do we begin and end?

Build you discipleship paths in context with your church culture, your community and mission.

- It's okay to use resources that have already been created as you are building your discipleship path.
- Use those amazing resources but make the path your own.

2. Create Markers on the Discipleship Path for All Stages of Life

Listen to the words of our Education Pastor regarding children:

- *We want to have reasonable expectations for their walk with God at their stage of life and help them live their purpose in the Kingdom.*
- *We want authentic faith, not just good behavior.*

She asks questions like this:

- *What does a 3-year-old disciples of Jesus Christ look like?*
- *How can they live their purpose?*
- *What should he know? (Does he know that Jesus made him and loves him and wants to be his best friend? Does he understand the concept of praise?)*
- *What does an 8-year-old disciple look like? (Does she know that she can trust God no matter what, that she can make the wise choice even if no one around her does? That she can treat others the way that she wants to be treated?) What should they know and what should they look like? How can they live their purpose?*
- *What do 12-year-old disciples of Jesus Christ look like, what, what should they know? (Do they know what moral purity means? Do they know how to serve others, do they know the difference between courting and dating? Are they equipped to give good answers for their obvious lifestyle differences, let alone share gospel of Jesus Christ? How can they live their purpose?)*

3. Allow ministries in your local church to cross-pollinate and collaborate as you build your discipleship path.

- Create bridges or thoughtful hand-offs from children to youth, from youth to hyphen, etc.
- **ATC Story:** Bridges have been built between every stage from nursery to adulthood.
- Collaborate with parents
- Let parents know what the marker goals are.
- Let parents know the foundational topics you are teaching
- Encourage parents to dig deeper into those topics in conversation and devotions.

Identify the Rites of Passage on the Discipleship Paths

- Baby Dedication
- Repentance
- Baptism
- Holy Ghost
- Pre-K
- Children's ministry
- Youth Ministry
- Adult Membership

ATC STORY:

New Attenders:

- Home Bible Study
- Our Mission: KNOW Jesus Christ, GROW in Jesus Christ, SHOW the love of Jesus Christ.
- Our discipleship path:
 - Firm Foundations 101: KNOW (Prayer, Word, Church)
 - Firm Foundations 201 & 301: GROW (Doctrine & Distinction)
 - Firm Foundations 401: SHOW (Ministry Training)

- Meet with Pastor to present their ministry S.H.A.P.E. (Spiritual Gifts, Heart, Ability, Personality, Education Experience)
- On-board to ministry

Youth

- Every student goes through our Firm Foundations Class their senior year.
- Every student is given a ministry SHAPE assessment their senior year.
- **When a student graduates, they have a one-on-one meeting with me, the conversation includes these points:**
 - I welcome them into adult membership of ATC
 - I explain what it means to be an adult member of ATC
 - I explain the services we provide all members
 - I explain their privilege to vote at church business meetings.
 - I explain that they are no longer listed with their family in the church data base, they are now considered a single family
 - I explain if I have a problem or concern with them, I will go to them, not their parents.
 - They are welcome to come to me with concerns, our conversations will be confidential.
 - if they are attending college locally, we talk about the adult ministry they will be involved in.
 - I talk about leadership training if they meet the criteria.
 - I have them fill out a “membership card”