

Musical turn-around sparks surge in youth ministry_32105

March 18, 2005

Posted: 3/18/05

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By Marc Rogers

Southwestern Seminary

FORT WORTH (BP)—As recently as a generation ago, student participation in music ministry at most churches meant singing in the youth choir or playing in a bell choir. Especially gifted students might have had the rare opportunity to play piano or organ for the congregation.

But at one Fort Worth church, student participation in music and worship is undergoing a revolution.

When Youth Pastor Bill Bray arrived at Glenview Baptist Church six years ago, he noticed participation in the youth choir was lagging. Because involvement in the choir was a prerequisite for going on mission trips, many youth were missing out on ministry opportunities.

Youth
praise
bands
have
become
a vital
part of
the
outreach
ministry
at
Glenview
Baptist
Church
in Fort
Worth.

Bray saw the need for a change in the direction. Convinced that student-led worship could work to draw youth into a deeper commitment, Bray “threw together a band.”

“God provided four guys, and we had student-led worship for the first time,” Bray said.

Today, five youth praise bands are active at Glenview, comprising 40 to 50 students as instrumentalists and vocalists ranging in age from 12 to 18, or from seventh to 12th grade.

Three of the five bands lead worship each Wednesday evening for the sixth grade “Power Zone” and for the junior and senior high youth groups. The bands also take turns leading worship for the whole church.

The youth praise band ministry has produced a CD of youth-led worship

music, which has expanded their ministry to other churches and groups.

The bands frequently play at rallies, retreats, camps and Disciple Now weekends throughout the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Some of the bands have gone on trips to Russia, Mexico and Honduras as part of Glenview's mission outreach to youth and the world.

Bray had no background in music. So, he said, "at the beginning, until we got coordinators who were musical enough, I would just feed the students songs and say, 'Here are the chords, here are the charts, here are the CDs-learn them.'"

As the ministry grew, more and more students-many not formally trained in music-wanted to get involved.

Bray sensed God was in it when 70-plus students attended a meeting for youth interested in being in a band. Nevertheless, the ministry team must continually strike a balance between "involving as many youth as possible" and the need to "uphold a high standard of musical excellence."

The effort has been worth it, with Bray noting the youth bands "really involve (students) spiritually, teaching them to lead out in worship. It forces them to be responsible in their own walks with the Lord."

Bray maintains the spiritual emphasis by requiring every band member to participate in weekly accountability and discipleship groups in addition to rehearsals and practices as a band once a week.

"We've tried to raise the bar with (band members), and let them know that they have the responsibility to lead other students into the presence of God," Bray said. "And to do that, they need to be in the presence of God themselves on a regular basis."

Casey Meisinger, a high school junior, plays guitar, sings and is a youth

band leader at Glenview. He said he agrees with the emphasis on both musical quality and spiritual growth. Participating in the youth worship band has “completely changed my view of worship,” he said. “I don't view it now just as a way to sing and play. I view it as a way to express to God how much we love him.”

When he started with the band, Meisinger “just wanted to play ... it started as more of a musical thing. But now it is more of a spiritual thing.”

Youth intern David Martin, coordinator of the praise band ministry, was one of the four members of that first youth band Bray “threw together.” He credits Glenview's pastor, Dennis Baw, a guitarist himself who played in rock bands in his youth, for “loving youth and encouraging the music,” and “letting the youth lead the church in worship.”

Under Baw's leadership, Glenview was one of the first Baptist churches to adopt a contemporary music, praise and worship format in the early 1980s. But he also has encouraged his ministry team to recognize the importance of the classic hymns of the faith. He wants them taught to the youth and incorporated into worship services along with contemporary praise and worship music.

At Glenview, it is common to hear “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” and “Amazing Grace” sung by the youth group along with more recent compositions.

This mixture of old and new songs is an important connection between the generations in the church. “Our people are so thrilled when they hear the youth learning and playing the older hymns,” Baw said.

The ministry team at Glenview has found music is a key component of any ministry that seeks to lead students to Christ.

Bray said unchurched “musical kids find out about our students playing and

say: 'Oh, you play guitar? Cool. So do I. I'm in a band, too. What does your band do?' And that provides a bridge between them."

"In today's youth culture, music plays such a huge role. ... It's just amazing," Martin said. "We tried to cut the bands back to playing just two Sundays a month, but our students went crazy. They said: 'No. No. No. We need to have the bands all the time.'"

Baw is enthusiastic about the discipleship he sees the youth bands developing.

"We have tons of young people who are surrendering to full-time Christian service," the pastor said. "They are real about the spiritual quality. It's not hype. Sometimes I will stop by on Sunday afternoon when they are practicing, and they won't be singing or playing at all. They'll be on their knees, praying."

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