

Youth ministers challenged to create bold disciples

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ARLINGTON—In the midst of a cultural revolution where technology has cultivated a “me” generation and immorality is prevalent, youth ministers face the challenge of teaching students to become bold Christian disciples, speakers told participants at [Texas Baptists’ Youth Ministry Conclave](#).



Michael Evans, pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Mansfield, told youth ministers to prepare to serve courageously in the middle of a “cultural revolution.” (PHOTO / Leah Reynolds) Tim Elmore, founder and president of Georgia-based [Growing Leaders](#), spoke at the conclave, held Oct. 12-14 in Arlington.

Contemporary culture fosters “artificial maturity,” said Elmore, who has worked with students 36 years. Due primarily to ease of Internet access, young people are overexposed to information but underexposed to real-life experiences, he explained.

Elmore identified four mistakes the prevailing culture makes in dealing with youth: Risk too little, rescue too quickly, rave too easily and reward too frequently.

Those actions, while often performed with genuine hearts, may make students happy today, but they don't foster a healthy tomorrow, he insisted.



Digital Age, a Waco-based band, led in worship at Texas Baptists' Youth Ministry Conclave in Arlington. (PHOTO / Leah Reynolds) But youth ministers and anyone who works with youth ministry have a special role and opportunity to help students grow and mature.

"We have a place that's unique," Elmore said. "We're not (school) teachers, but since we're in the church, (parents) trust us," Elmore said.

Leading students takes a different way of thinking, he noted. For instance:

- Don't think control; think connect.
- Don't think inform; think interpret.
- Don't think entertain; think equip.
- Don't think prevent; think prepare.

- Don't think manage; think mentor.

Those steps will help students reach a higher level of maturity counter to the “me” culture that surrounds them, he said.

Michael Evans, pastor of [Bethlehem Baptist Church in Mansfield](#), also commented on what he termed a “cultural revolution.”



Participants at Texas Baptists' Youth Ministry Conclave enjoy fellowship and networking opportunities in the exhibit hall. (PHOTO / Leah Reynolds)“We’re living in such strange times now where Christians are no longer able to hide,” he told the youth workers. “Fewer Americans claim Christ as their Savior. I believe we are in the midst of a cultural revolution.”

In a world that’s bold about its lifestyle choices, Evans encouraged youth workers to be courageous in their ministry.

“You’re going to have to make it known who you are, and you are going to have to make disciples and make bold disciples,” he said.

The Youth Ministry Conclave also featured speakers Dennis Wiles, pastor of

[First Baptist Church in Arlington](#), and [Ed Newton](#), Bible educator and evangelist from Florida. [The Digital Age](#) led in worship, and various experts directed informational conferences centered on developing strong and effective youth ministries.