

Annual Report to Churches & Executive

South New Zealand

Youth Ministry in 2020:

Youth ministry has faced a lot of changes and challenges in 2020. The lockdown and changing Covid levels forced many changes to all the planned opportunities of worship, fellowship, training and connecting for our young people. After Big Camp at the start of the year, every single youth event has had to be cancelled, moved and/or changed from what was originally planned. Very few events have been cancelled (offering our young people *something* is always better than offering *nothing*) but every event that has occurred has been in a different form to the original plan. This has meant events have had to be doubled planned – Plan A and then Plan B from Covid changes. Thankfully, the use of video conferencing has provided an avenue for many things to still happen (when meeting in person has not been possible). While gathering in person is always the preferred method for youth ministry, we have found a good portion of our young people have been willing and able to use technology effectively to come together. Finally, a lot of momentum and plans for this year have changed. The beginning of the year saw a lot of youth leaders and young people ready to work together but much of this momentum has stalled after so much time apart. Many youth groups are back to basics in terms of making and keeping connections with their own team. This isn't a bad thing in a year that needs us to keep reaching out to our young people but it has reset many of the opportunities that were unfolding at the start of the year.

Big Camp – Sarah-Jane Riley organised and ran a vibrant Youth program for the SNZ Big Camp at the start of this year.

Cancelled events (due to Covid-19) – the annual *Global Youth Day* and *Youth Week of Prayer* in March were cancelled as this was when the Covid levels and lockdown were first initiated.

Postponed events (due to Covid-19) – 3 major events have been postponed and moved this year – *Junior Teen Camp*, *Basketball Tournament*, and *Volleyball Tournament*. *Junior Teen Camp* has been moved to the Sept/October school holidays and the 2 sports tournaments have been moved to mid-October and combined into one event. These changes have been made to hopefully place them in a period when the levels mean they can happen as in-person events.

Changed events (due to Covid-19) – the date and format for this year's *Youth Leader Summit* was changed to best give youth leaders a chance to meet and be equipped. It was moved to a month after the lockdown lifted so leaders had a chance to re-establish their youth ministry and then be able to come together. Usually this event is run at Mt Hutt Retreat but it was shifted to the Conference office in Christchurch to help leaders have time locally in their church on Sabbath morning (since they had lost so many Sabbaths there already). The visiting leaders from outside Christchurch were able to visit other churches on Sabbath morning. We had 16 leaders come together from all over South NZ for this event and Victor Kulakov and Sarah-Jane Riley led them through the SHAPE resource which helps clarify an individual's unique gifting, calling and shaping by God. Another event that changed was this year's *Ignite Weekend* for young adults. Due to Covid levels, this became an online event with 3 sessions on Zoom designed to help young adults grow closer to God and each other and to be further equipped for their walk with Jesus. While not all the registered young adults joined us for the online change, those that did really used the format to connect, share, grow and worship together.

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Preaching + Connecting – the original plan this year was to visit every South NZ church with youth. This began with 2 meetings with Christchurch youth leaders at the beginning of the year. But unfortunately the Covid levels cancelled many of the scheduled Sabbath local church visits to see what is happening and how I can assist. I have been able to be present at 2 Southland Region youth camps (run by the Southern leaders) and have preached at Bishopdale, Ashburton, Rangiora and U+I churches. I have also been able to support the *Revolution* Friday night programs hosted by CAS at Papanui. I have also organised 3 *Young Adult Sabbaths* where local churches invite young adults to join them for a Sabbath. This creates some great opportunities for young adults to come together in a local church to form friendships, worship together and know they have local churches that care about them. These will happen for the Southland on Sept 19, Christchurch on October 24, and Nelson on Nov 9.

Online Programs – with so many live events moved or cancelled, much time has been spent creating online events to provide a space for young people to connect and worship. The first of these were *Breakout* on Friday nights through the lockdown. This livestream program involved 5 youth pastors from all over NZ (SJ Riley, Tulaga Aiolutepa, Victor Kulakov, Willie Ilerua and myself) and was run like a life group with sharing, activities, guests and questions. This proved to be very successful in helping young people feel connected during the lockdown and it received 1-2.5K views each week. I also organised a short series of an *online youth life group*. 6 Christchurch youth came together weekly to model how to run a life/small group. This was recorded and shared each Friday night for 6 weeks. They used the 5 life group elements of fun, food, fellowship, fuel and flavour (a resource developed by the NZ youth pastors). Since finishing up the recording for this, the group has continued as a life group meeting up in person.

Plans + Direction Moving Forward:

Moving forward, it looks like uncertainty around levels and staying flexible will be the reality for youth ministry. This means the format and focus of this year will continue in the foreseeable future. But this does not diminish our aim of ensuring that all events and efforts for our young people align with the Conference direction of ensuring they get to *Know Jesus, Live Jesus, and Share Jesus*.

Support Local Churches. I will continue to touch base with local churches and local leaders to see how I can best assist them with their youth ministry. I will also continue to develop discipleship and leadership tools that relate to the current realities of youth ministry, covid restrictions, and young people. This includes looking for new or refined ways to empower and equip young people and their leaders. This also includes sharing or developing resources and tools to help our local churches best work with their young people. I have a few excellent tools but these are always shared/refined according to the unique needs of a local church (as no resource or tool meets the needs or realities of every local church).

Online Events. I will continue to provide online opportunities to connect, share and worship.

In-Person Events. When possible, I will provide in-person events for worship, connecting and equipping. This includes encouraging and organising more opportunities for wider connections for our young people, e.g. local churches in a region coming together and opportunities for North Island and South Island young people to come together. This wider connecting is already happening in the Southland region and it would be great to see it more in Christchurch and up north. I would also like to explore creating some new worship opportunities in the Christchurch

area to provide an avenue for young people to come together – this would not compete with anything currently happening but aim to provide added value to what local churches are doing.

Life Groups & Mentoring. I will encourage local churches to organise and offer life/small groups and mentoring for their young people (where this isn't already happening). Our Adventist church has emphasized life/small groups and mentoring as the 2 biggest tools our young people need. Both these things are instrumental for effective disciple-making of our young people and are especially good through the uncertain levels of Covid. This will also include personal mentoring of young leaders by myself when I get the chance, e.g. at Junior Teen Camp with my staffing team and providing spaces at worship events for young people to share. An example of this is that I have been asked to speak at the North NZ Pathfinder Camporee at the end of this year – I have arranged to bring 2 young South NZ leaders with me to share the speaking to give them the opportunity to speak into the lives of hundreds of Pathfinders in a unique worship space.

Conference Vision. I will continue to align all youth events and training with the Conference vision of making disciples and disciple-makers, e.g. the annual sports tournaments are being encouraged as great opportunities for connecting, modelling and mentoring young people as they learn to play for God's glory and not their own.

Thank you for your continued support and encouragement of our young people as they navigate through this difficult time as disciples of Jesus.

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