

Life in the Holy Spirit - Ministry Reports

Youth & Family

I have six kids that I love dearly but the space walking into our house from the garage is chaos. They dump their shoes and coats and it is a mess! So my husband bought boxes to help keep each kids' shoes separate. Each child has their own cubby or box for their stuff - brilliant! Cubbies or boxes are really great for keeping kids' stuff organized but really devastating when applied to our lives. We tend to do this - we create "cubbie compartments" that keep our relationships, work, spirituality, emotions, bodies, and minds nicely divided and separated from one another. We have embraced the deception of compartmentalization - that life will be easier, better, happier, and more desirable if we can break up our life and ourselves into different categories: sacred vs. secular, spiritual vs. material, soul, mind, body. But the reality is that we are more like an eco-system. There are different aspects to our lives: mental, vocational, emotional, spiritual, physical, and relational but they affect each other.

The "soul ecosystem" flourishes when each of the elements are valued, resourced, and developed over time. We do not have souls that need saving - we are souls that need saving. Our whole existence needs to be rescued and healed by Jesus. Our body, mind, and emotions. Our attitudes, desires, and spirituality. Our habits, relationships, and approach to work. The entirety of our lives is under the care of God.

This past year the leaders of DRM kid, student, and family ministry embraced this. We noticed together where God was getting our attention in our monthly zoom call meeting, we asked compassionate, curious questions of ourselves, and we responded in obedience to what God was leading us into. We first unpacked what leads to burn out and we were honest with each other. We then we brought in Matt Alexander to teach on soul care. The DRM made those soul care strategies happen by financially and emotional giving support. For some that meant beginning to take a wilderness day alone with God every month, for one pastor in meant committing to a gym and making a rhythm of exercise, for others it meant diving into hard conversations with co-workers. Because those areas were not compartmentalized but were affecting the whole of who we are and the ministry we oversaw.

We began to encourage this posture to those around us: our co-workers, our families, our congregations. We encouraged kids, students, and their families in the same way. There were trainings withing the DRM that addressed mental health, sexual misconduct, teaching parents how to be the spiritual influencer of their kids, and more. We educated and examined ourselves and then we encouraged and challenged those we influence to be about that same.

And God blessed us. Our lives were affected and so were many other families' lives. I am so thankful for the team of people God has gathered in the kid, student, and family ministry in our Diocese. The leadership is expanding to be a joint leadership as more directors and pastors are participating in our monthly calls, and hundreds or families are being impacted to see childhood beliefs transformed into genuine lifetime faith.

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One story - Abigail is 6 years old and has been having stomach pain for the past year. So far no doctor or test has revealed what the problem is. A few months ago, Abigail asked her kid pastor to pray for her. The longevity of her physical pain was affecting her spiritual beliefs. Remember we are not cubbies. Her pastor prayed with her and her parents, and this prayer time gave opportunity to dialogue about what you do if you are starting to doubt God's goodness. Perhaps many of you are expecting the story to end with Abigail getting healed, but she hasn't. As of last week, she was still having tummy aches almost every day, and I ask that you join me in praying for her. However, this is a picture of how I believe God is working in the DRM families. He is active and present in our lives and in the kids' lives. He is doing things. In this case he is working in Abigail and her parent's lives in a way that is causing them to rely on God in deeper and more full ways. And this is not the end of the story.

God is real. And I am thankful we have a real God who meets us in our pain and in our lives and wants to bring Himself and the great and wholistic healing that comes with Him. Discipling and teaching kids does not only come from a book or curriculum, but He used the playground of our lives to reveal himself. He is doing this in Abigail's life, and he is doing this in our lives. We covet your prayers for us as we continue to lean in and listen for how to tend to the "soul ecosystem" of those we have been given in our midst.

-Christy Penley