

sustainable youth ministry

By Mark DeVries

Reviewed by Ruth Hassall

Mark DeVries begins this book with an apology: 'I'm embarrassed that this book is less about the treasure and more about the clay pots that carry the treasure'.

However, having heard so many stories over recent months of youth pastors and volunteers who have left their roles largely because of failures in the infrastructure of their ministry rather than the content, I think this book is incredibly timely.

DeVries heads up *Youth Architects* in the US, a youth group consulting firm that is committed to building sustainable youth ministries, one church at a time, around America. It's from this background and years of hands-on experience that he writes in a really practical and helpful way.

Although this is clearly a book about youth ministry, the audience for this book goes beyond the youth leader. Any minister or vicar of a church with a youth group would be wise to read this book, which highlights the key stumbling points for youth ministries. DeVries illustrates that for the most part youth ministries don't fail because of the content of what

is taught: they fail because of faulty structures which are replicated time and time again with the arrival of each new youth pastor.

The purpose of his book is to promote longevity and sustainability for both youth leaders and youth ministries. Through it he provides practical systems that churches can incorporate which will lead to enduring youth ministry and less burnout amongst youth pastors.

DeVries offers, amongst many other things, helpful advice to youth pastors on how to recruit and look after volunteers; advice for churches on what to look for when recruiting a new youth pastor, recognising the tendency to try and find the superhero who will solve all the church's problems. He goes on to give a picture of what a healthy and long-lasting ministry would look like and how to go about putting in systems that will provide a strong framework for faith development to take place.

In this book, DeVries certainly doesn't offer a quick fix, but gives wise, well thought out advice with personal anecdotes that illustrate his points.

I think this book is an invaluable contribution to the youth ministry field, largely because of DeVries' distinction between theology and method in youth ministry, (and the need for both) but also because of his emphasis on whole church responsibility for developing a sustainable youth ministry.

He finishes with some really useful appendices offering good discussion questions that will lead to great conversations between youth pastors and those responsible for them, and helpful checklists to refer back to.

This is a book that I shall return to again and again.

