



**RESIST
-ANCE
IN YOUTH MINISTRY**

SOWING THE
SEEDS OF SLOW

It helps, now and then, to step back and
take a long view.
The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is even beyond our vision.
We accomplish in our lifetime
only a tiny fraction
of the magnificent enterprise
that is God's work.



We plant a seed that will one day grow.
We water seeds already planted,
knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations
that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects
far beyond our capabilities.

A FUTURE NOT OUR OWN

Nothing we do is complete,
which is another way of saying
that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.

No prayer fully expresses our faith.

No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness.

No programme
accomplishes the Church's mission.

No set of goals and objectives
includes everything.

That is what we are about.

We provide yeast that produces effects
far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything,
and there is a sense of liberation
in realising that.

This enables us to do something,
and to do it very well.

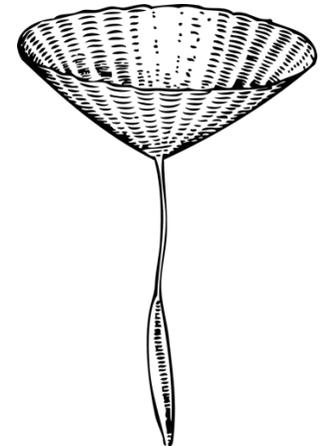
It may be incomplete,

but it is a beginning,
a step along the way,
an opportunity for the Lord's grace
to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results,
but that is the difference
between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders,
ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own.



Composed by Bishop
Ken Untener of
Saginaw but often
attributed to Bishop
Oscar Romero. We
have found this prayer
resonant with our
experiences of working
with young people.



GROWTH AT A SNAIL'S PACE

by Simon Halls

I was walking home last night when a car pulled up next to me and the little sister of one of the young people we work with, leaned out of the window, and offered me a bag of snails!

I've been offered plenty of things from car windows across the years, but this had to be up there as one of the stranger items! She had spent the afternoon collecting snails and putting them into a plastic bag. As nice as the offer was the girl went off with her bag of snails intact celebrating her new – possibly soon to cease to exist – friends!

The snail is meant to be the embodiment of slow. Having been in our context for coming up 28 years it could have looked like things have been moving at a snail's pace. With sometimes little 'tangible' to show for the time we have been here. However, I'm not sure it has ever felt like that on the ground. Life has been fast paced, chaotic, breathless, many times never sure where the next chaos, drama, or incident might come from. Progress and having anything 'sustainable' or 'measurable' has been beyond slow however the connections and relationships have been fast and fruitful.

As I look across the years, probably the thing that has been the slowest has been the ability of my heart and head to be changed by God. I love the question that Sam Wells raises about what was going on with Jesus in the first 30 years of his life in the 'Nazareth Manifesto'. We know God can use children and young people powerfully so why did he wait until Jesus was 30? What were those 30 years about when seemingly nothing happened. We often ignore, or forget this part of the story.

**FOR US THE 25+ YEARS WE HAVE BEEN
HERE HAVE OFTEN BEEN ABOUT GODS
SMALL SLOW CHANGE IN OUR
UNDERSTANDING OF OUR CONTEXT.**

but also our own motivations – motivations to want to fix situations rather than listen and share the pain; to always be the host and when we needed to create space, time and vulnerability to be the guest; of somehow feeling it's all reliant on us – when it's actually about God. There has been a slow, sometimes painful, unpeeling of inherited layers of misunderstanding, poor theology & perceived cultural norms – among many others.

However in that slowness has come the gradual revealing of Jesus' greater love for us, and our friends and neighbours. That in pausing, stalling, learning not to knee-jerk, to not have to 'fix' every situation or person encountered, that

Christ is revealed in very different, more whole, more sustainable, more authentic and meaningful ways. That in the chaos and precarious nature of life here, that slow is the very pace that is needed. I don't know what the future holds for the poor bag of snails but maybe for us a snail's pace isn't so bad after all!

NOTICE MORE

by Pip Lovell

When I arrived at my new job there was very little in place. I knew I would have to go slow to build things up again. It would take time to find my feet as my previous setting was very different. I was going to have to work hard to get up to speed, and I felt the expectation to get the different groups to where they were before my predecessor left. I had to go slow enough to create space for me and the young people to get to know each other; and how they like to do things. But I did not predict how slow I'd end up going...

The pandemic forced us all to slow down. A lot was put on hold. I hear some youth workers stepped up a gear: producing resources, digital content, delivering packages and more. Not me. Most things in my youth work slowed down. I was quick to go online with my two

main groups; and I did some filming or recording bits for church, but that was it. The lunch club I was preparing, didn't start; the group for older teens fell apart. Then my other job was furloughed. I felt at a loss... if I'm not doing 'all the things' for God, then who am I? What am I worth? I don't know if you can relate to this? Real or not, I feel all this pressure (both internal and external) to do more, produce results, increase numbers... whatever the current demand is. Slowing down was hard.

But in slowing down, slower than I'd planned, I realised how much we get caught up in the 'doing for' God and leave until last the 'being with' God. In slowing down, in a more peaceful approach, I began to notice more things.



I NOTICED...

- ... that resting, and taking time over things is a lost art.
- ... that the relationships and conversations we have are way more important than outcomes
- ... that when we look too fast, we overlook injustice and the small acts of goodness that shine a light in the darkness.
- ... that slowing down gave me a chance to be more organised in my practice – more time to review, reflect and carefully plan. And the work was better for it.
- ... more space to pray, to be creative, research ideas and start new partnerships
- ... changes in situations and people, and in myself. I found opportunity to take better care of the mental, emotional and spiritual welfare of those around us – and my own (very important in our line of work!)

I think I like the slower pace of life... I have taken to reminding myself to take a longer view, a longer look, at the present. Because being present, 'being with' God, is how we bring who we are (and who God is) into our doing. We might not see the big harvest but in going slowly we might plant better seeds. This is what I have learned: go slow, take a beat. Listen. Do not do as the world does but go to the rhythm God gives you, whatever speed or season you find yourself in.

IS GOD SLOW?

By Rich Martin

What is slow? Whose definition of slow are we holding as a controlling factor of how we spend our day - and why do we have to justify our productivity and speed? Who bestowed these pressures on me?!

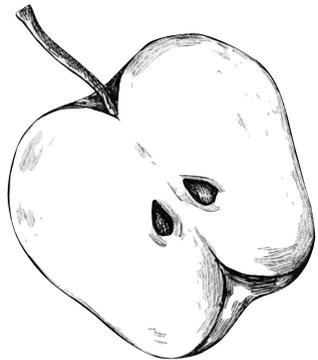
“Do not worry”
(Matthew something or other!)

Can the idea and language of slowing down be described as refocusing, becoming one with, living in the now? Is sitting in a room, watching a candle burn or any activity that we might associate with slowing down actually an act of slowing down, or does this act allow us to connect to a beautiful flow of energy by quieting our minds, and refocusing on what's important, allowing another's voice more important than our own into our headspace which will therefore allow us to move more quickly into the flow and way of thinking and being that allows us to act with clarity, responding to people with confidence in the place where God has asked us to live.

Is the long view long, or is it the path?

Is the sabbath slowing down or gearing up?

Or is it slowing us down so we can gear up?



Of course our minds can go so fast that we need to 'slow them down' to take stock of what's done and who we are and who we are in God, and that if we don't do that then we run the risk of burning out, allowing ourselves to be swamped by inconsequential crap, but for me, really, sabbath values and practice speeds me up, because I move down a clearer more settled path that allows me to drink in the beautiful views around me as we walk through the garden of creation naming new things hand in hand with God and the other, this is how real relationships are built, being with and responding to, trying to get your noisy impatient self out the way. Slowing down, means you take more in, your insights and experiences have more depth and a richer tapestry because you see, hear and feel more.

The bible does talk a lot about waiting for God, in my mind that conjures up pictures of me tapping my watch and foot looking over my shoulder saying come on God, hurry up! As if I got there first and know better! Really there were other things to notice and to see before our paths begin to converge. I wonder if 'wait on God' could mean, wind your neck in! Not so much slow down waiting on God but 'ahh once again you are ahead of yourself, you need to see your actual position in this journey isn't as far ahead as you think it is mate, you're actually all the way back here, and there are things to see here, to learn about'.

'Love has its speed. It is a spiritual speed. It is a different kind of speed from the technological speed to which we are accustomed. It goes on in the depth of our life, whether we notice or not, at three miles an hour. It is the speed we walk and therefore the speed the love of God walks.

Kosuke Koyama –
Three Mile an Hour
God

THE BEST THINGS CANNOT BE RUSHED

By Emily Lonsdale

It is Saturday afternoon and I am exhausted. This is not a new feeling and not one that is easy to solve. I have a condition that means I have chronic pain and I suffer from chronic fatigue syndrome. I have since I was a teenager. Actually this was the reason that I wanted to work with young people. I wanted to create places where they could rest and learn the value of slowing down.

It's not easy, there is a perception of youth work that it needs to be all bounce, bounce, bounce! Never stop, never surrender! A ringleader youth worker playing crazy youth club games AND juggling the many demands of ministry. Young people simply watch in awe and follow their example into good clean-cut adulthood.

This is fine... but not all the time.

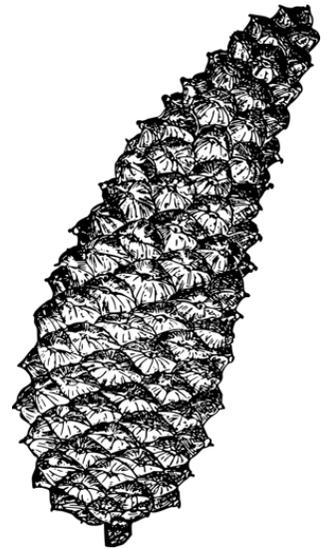
The pressure of youth ministry is immense and I wonder if this is why there are so few youth workers over the age of 30. I have so many friends who were great youth workers who could not continue. They never found the balance - or were never allowed to find it (?). A youth worker who admits to being tired might find themselves being 'moved on'. When I started working for the Church, I fell into this trap. I went through three jobs before I realised that I was not the poster girl for that kind of youth work.

I took a sidestep into running a youth centre where I could create spaces owned and led by young people. I spent five years there showing young people the value of rest. In particular I remember starting a group for young people who were out of education due to ill-health. Here we could go slow

when needed. This had personal significance because of my experiences of isolation and ill health at school. I loved giving this small group the time and space that they needed, through simple things like watching films and playing board games.

When I had children of my own I stepped away to focus on them. Out of a youth ministry role I was able to invest in my family and volunteer leading an all-age community craft centre. I have had to learn this lesson over and over. In a moment of madness, I decided to return to church youth work. But I quickly realised I need to walk my own road, at my own pace.

Now I'm trying something new. I am learning about my community, building bridges, and working slowly to be in the right place to start a new project. I am trusting it will happen - but it takes time. I would love to snap my fingers and be ready, but I have learned that some things, the best things, cannot be rushed.



THE MOST INFLUENTIAL THING WE GIVE TO YOUNG PEOPLE IS OURSELVES

by Nikky Mungeam

I've been employed as a chaplain for the last 8 years, working with young people in school and then in a hostel. 15 months ago I was put on furlough and my life, overnight, took on a very different pace as it became dramatically slower. And in the slowness I began to notice things I was usually too busy to see...

I began to realise just how tired I was and how little I felt I had left to give anyone. In fact, I felt sheer panic at the thought of being asked to go back to the role I was used to doing quite confidently.

Coinciding with this realisation I found myself in-between homes and staying in a beautiful retreat house in the country. Little did I know how significant this time would be - and I am still here!

I'm convinced that the most influential thing we give to young people is ourselves. The more I've realised who I really am behind the role I'm used to fulfilling, the more I realise how important self reflection and self care is.

I've realised this through facing the fear and the power of quiet, even silence, in my life. I've also realised that on the days I've felt most despairing, being outside will help bring calm and act like 'medicine'. I've realised that the more I take time to notice and respond to my wounds (which often reveal themselves in my emotional responses) the more this shapes my ability to move forward and give to others.

Another realisation is that I am made to create. Whether it's cooking, gardening, art, music, problem solving, the art of creativity is life giving. The more I've washed pots, swept floors and pulled up weeds for my 'keep' at the house, I've realised that how I approach these every day, behind the scenes, activities is the true thermometer of how I'm doing on the inside...and so I could go on. The learning it seems is endless and in many ways nothing I didn't really 'know', but 'knowing' and actually 'doing' are two very different things! Experiencing these things has brought the theory alive!

As I've begun to feel more awake on the inside I've gradually felt signs of life reappear around my passion for working with young people. And I'm thankful that I am still passionate about the thing that has always been my motivation for working with them. I am more convinced than ever that young people need 'a good listening to' rather than 'a good talking to' because when you give someone your full attention you show them their value and worth. If every young person had one person in their lives to truly listen to them (even for just half an hour each week) this would have a huge impact on their wellbeing. And my

own vulnerability and ability to learn and grow will determine how healthy I am and how authentically I can truly give.

Bombarded with bad news and being told what they're 'not', young people need to hear (perhaps more so now than ever) some good news about who they are...to be listened to, to enjoy the outdoors, to realise their creativity and the significance of everyday ordinary lives lived well. And perhaps those of us who walk alongside them can benefit from realising afresh the same.

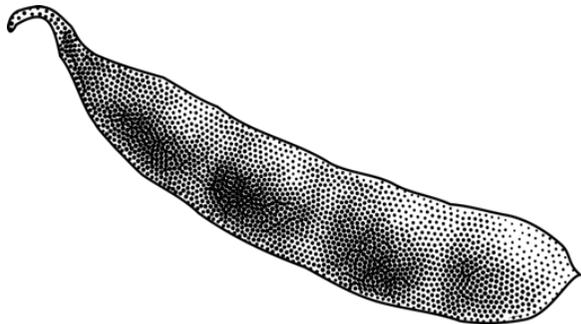


WHAT'S THE SLOWEST PIECE OF YOUTH WORK YOU'VE DONE?

Slow youth work feels like the anthesis of the world right now (not the Covid affected world but the rhetoric that we all live tangled up in) and also feels like an upside-down thing that Jesus would have liked and others would have got riled up by! I really hope that after these years of the pandemic the Youth Worker community will focus on the 'slow'. there has been so much extra that has been broken over this last year for young people and their communities and there will be no quick fix for any of it. Instead my prayer is that deeper, slower, more nourishing, stronger relationships will be born from the rubble through the slow and steady beat of feet walking alongside each other.

A slow piece of youth work I did was, to take a group away on a Fri to Sun residential with no agenda or activities planned. We spent the time hanging out, cooking, eating watching movies and sitting around bonfires. Back then it felt quite radical to have to no agenda and nothing to show for it at the end. This is now my preferred way of doing residential

I have this one young person who I met out on detached when he was about 7yrs old. I used to push him on the swings in the park. He's now 17 and a parent. He's still coming to one of our groups. It's a really long journey with many highs and some lows. It's not the quick wins but the slow journeying with him & his family - and he's become a gatekeeper to many others.



IN YOUR SLOW YOUTH WORK, HOW DO YOU PRACTICE SELF CARE?

I think self-care in the workplace is really difficult. They are a buzz topic at the moment, but its treated as a bit of a 'dream on' idea. Often in small charities people are giving up a lot and throwing all they have into the cause. So having time to actually implement slowing down practices for well-being seems not only like a luxury we can't afford; but also counter intuitive to getting

some very important stuff done. The culture of hurry hasn't cottoned onto the idea that when people are in a good place productivity and effectiveness are higher. We live in a cult of busyness where speed, a full schedule and a hectic lifestyle are measures of success. Sadly it feels like the church (and youth ministry) has allowed itself to be influenced by this culture.

WHEN HAS RESISTING A FAST PACE IN YOUR YOUTH WORK MADE A DIFFERENCE?

A few years ago we changed gear on our summer programme - we had been running an activity club in the church hall with volunteers making the food. We realised we were burning ourselves out making lunch and not present with the young people. We shifted to a picnic in the park model and paid a local cafe to make lunches. People brought their families. Youth

workers were more present with people. It was a small change, but it's made a big difference to how our summer stuff runs - and incidentally to the scale, because the slower model is a lot more scalable.