



A Case Study

Human Flourishing

The Post Coronavirus Effects on
Youth Ministry in the Czech Republic

BY ANNA JANOUŠKOVÁ



How the pandemic has effected mission and ministry to the youth in the Czech Republic

Tiny Virus, Worldwide Effects

Back in June 2021, a small training team of Czech first-culture missionaries within Josiah Venture[1] carried out a qualitative case study, which sought to investigate the current state of local youth groups impacted by the coronavirus-related lockdown. The main premise of this article is that in order to be effective in mission, it is necessary to understand the people we minister to. To use micro-evolutionary jargon, it is necessary for the Church to adjust to the ever-changing environment without losing its "saltiness"[2]. The case of Czech Republic is not extraordinary, but it rather illustrates one of the many missional responses to the universal global pandemic. In other words, my hope is that you will benefit from this study as you have been going

through the same crisis caused by the COVID-19 virus - regardless of our different socio-cultural backgrounds. After all, we all experienced the effects of one virus, but each one of us responded somewhat differently. Unless using a microscope, the virus is invisible but its manifestations are very evident - it affects trade, employment, prices, travel, rents, housing, food supplies, education, mental health, etc.

The Case Study Design

Our team conducted 54 in-depth online interviews with youth leaders (37 men and 15 women between the ages of 18 to 38) from various Czech Evangelical denominations, in order to find out more about their subjective experience of the coronavirus crisis, and how the pandemic affected their practical

ministry in their local contexts. It is important to note that these leaders are predominantly volunteer Church workers, who are either enrolled in a college degree or a full-time job.

Five Key Findings

The first three findings (demotivation, negative emotions, lack of spontaneity) depict the negative impacts of the pandemic on the respondents' youth ministry, whilst the last two points (small deeds of love, spiritual disciplines) reveal some of the benefits, or gains, as perceived by the interviewees.

a. (De)motivation

One of the leitmotifs in the respondents' answers were undoubtedly mentions of demotivation. The biggest

[1] Josiah Venture represents a mission organisation based in various countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Strong emphasis is placed on training and equipping local young leaders to fulfil Christ's commission. (Josiah Venture, 2021)

[2] "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot." (Matthew 5:13, NIV)

demotivating factor was uncertainty caused by the ever-present unanswered question “How long will the lockdown last?”. In addition to this, many of our respondents expressed that they struggled with extrinsically motivating[3] others from afar (either over Zoom or via messages) amid formless mundanity. These leaders often choose to work with, and motivate people, who already possess some form of intrinsic motivation[4]. Without any “light at the end of the tunnel”, it is impossible for the youth leaders to plan ahead long term, and their community is, therefore, only being maintained rather than expanded. It is to be noted that:

b. Negative Emotions

We humans naturally tend to fear situations which we cannot completely control. That is also the reason why some of our biggest psychological and health threats are events such as natural disasters, important exams, cancer, along with illnesses including infections and viruses. This was evident in the interviewees’ responses. No wonder that the majority of our respondents stated that about half of their youth group members experience strong negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, hopelessness and insecurity. Surprisingly though, they do not perceive an increase in mental disorders and diagnoses. This may be caused by the fact that they are not the only ones experiencing the effects of COVID-19, but rather they realise there are millions of others in the world undergoing the same experience.

c. Lack of Spontaneity

Nearly all teenagers notice that everything has become purposeful, organised, tested, sterile, and rigid, under the aegis of social responses addressing the threat of the virus. According to them, youth life lacks spontaneity, and informal time together, where one can meet new people or have random conversations. As a result, there is a sense of reluctance to share any personal stories, updates, or struggles, with others online as it feels unnatural. To conclude, most of the youth leaders interviewed have experienced first-hand that online relationships may replace real ones in the short-term, but it is impossible to do so effectively from a long-term perspective.

d. Small Deeds of Love

Considering the lack of in-person communication, it should come with no surprise that many of our respondents reported the highly positive effects of a personal approach. Young people deeply value practical personalised acts, such as a hand-written



[3] Extrinsic motivation is driven by a possibility of gaining an external (outer) reward. (Fischer et al., 2019)

[4] Intrinsic motivation comes from within; in other words, it is represented by activities that are internally rewarding. (Fischer et al., 2019)



letter, an encouraging message, an afternoon walk, or a gift as small (and yet grand) as expressions of love. These acts of love succeed in maintaining already existing natural friendships, as it is quite hard to form new ones.

e. Spiritual Disciplines

Lastly, both the interviewed youth leaders and the young people in youth groups realise the need for praying more frequently. Most leaders notice an improvement in their community's prayer life, compared to how it had been prior to the pandemic. Young people who are more disciplined read the Bible more regularly because they have more time to do so. Nevertheless, in youth groups where leaders are proactively creating a culture of regular Bible reading together, local

youth group members (even the least disciplined) are doing better.

Continuing the Conversation

Our team did not want to keep our findings in a drawer, so we asked our talented social media staff to share the project outcomes with other youth leaders, and young Christians on Instagram and Facebook. We wanted to remind them that regardless of their ever-changing conditions and environment, they can receive deep comfort found in fellowship. We believe that through being vulnerable in front of one another, we can experience healing, inspiration, but also proximity. That is also why we (with the interviewees' permissions) shared some of our findings with the online world.

Hundreds of Czech young believers have been participating in online polls, questionnaires, and commenting on various posts. Our prayer is that they, but also you, can identify the current situation and needs of their/your youth group, and, either, know that they/you are not alone in this, or be inspired to try new things in their/your local missional context.

Bibliography

The Holy Bible (1984) New International Version (NIV). Zondervan Publishing House.
 Fischer C., Malycha C.P. & Schafmann E. (2019) The Influence of Intrinsic Motivation and Synergistic Extrinsic Motivators on Creativity and Innovation. *Frontiers Psychol.* 10:137. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00137
 Josiah Venture (2021) Doctrinal Statement [online]. Available at: www.josiahventure.com/about/structure/doctrinal-statement [accessed on November 15 2021]. ♦