



# Developments in Youth Ministry: An Interview with Pete Telfer

**Pete was interviewed by Missional Focus co-editor Carol Clarke in December 2022.**

**Carol Clarke (CC):** Pete, thank you for agreeing to take part in this *Missional Focus* issue, which is focusing on the theme of 'Missional Youth'. Can you start by telling me a little bit about yourself?

**Pete Telfer (PT):** Sure. I have been leading youth ministry for over twenty years. I have also been involved in missional education for 16 years. I started off as a professional trainer for Oasis Trust in 2007, then I became a Professional Mentor with Oasis College, for approximately 6 years, as well as a Fieldwork Tutor for 3 years. Then I became a Campus Leader for Reign Youth which works in partnership with ForMission College. I recently achieved an MA in Missional Leadership (with merit) at ForMission College. I am now a Network Support Manager at TLG ([www.tlg.org.uk](http://www.tlg.org.uk)) where we partner and support churches to reach out to the most vulnerable children and young people in the UK and seeing hope spread.

**CC:** In the context of your ministry, what approaches to mission have helped in proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God?

**PT:** Different approaches of mission have helped to shape the way I proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God. I was brought up with theology of 'bringing Jesus to People' and it sometimes was quite pressured. What I mean by this is, going on to the streets and handing out tracts; in certain context this may work, but that represents a

kind of theology where we are the ones that are responsible because we have been given this task and we must just do it. However, over the years I've discovered the beauty of *missio Dei* in that mission is about joining in with what God is already up to and in a more natural and normal way.

**CC:** Pete, what are some of the ways you have engaged in missional praxis?

**PT:** To demonstrate missional praxis, I started youth ministry from scratch in Aylesbury. I also worked with Intercontinental Church Society (ICS) at a small church in Zermatt in Switzerland (skiing mission) which had a profound impact. My time at ICS approximately 20 years ago would mean spending time intentionally praying for each other and for missional opportunities, having a meal together and sharing within the community. God just did stuff! It was so simple but profound because the challenge was always about how I apply what I had learnt. Going through missional leadership reinforced this experience.

The challenge for us all is we have our different lives, and it is so easy to lose that rhythm. We were intentional about the skiing holiday, but there was an openness and willingness and I believe this is how it should be when it comes to mission. Mission need not be complex; it is quite simple. The issue is, we make it complicated and there are many barriers that can get in the way of that, such as routines, church methods or culture, temptation, a lack of regular connection with God – all kinds of things can get in the way.

**CC:** What things are shaping the missional context for young Christians today?

**PT:** From a society level, there is a greater recognition of the choices the government makes. These choices don't just affect older people, but also young people. For example, let's think about climate change – young people recognise the choices that are made will affect them in later life. Young people also hate hypocrisy; there is a great level of distrust and young people are not afraid to speak out. Young people can be very passionate, desiring to impact and change lives. We must support and encourage them to do this. In order to be effective missionaries, whether that be home or away, they need to be effectively disciplined, just in the same way that Jesus modelled with His disciples.

**CC:** Pete, what developments are you aware of in training young Christians for mission?

**PT:** I believe Covid has challenged everyone and has caused organisations and churches to pause, re-evaluate and rethink the way they do things. This presents a great opportunity for mission and the way we do church. For national Christian training organisations, Covid has been a factor. I believe Covid has generated a culture and a norm for this season, and it will take time because people are still trying to adapt to the new normal. There is still an apprehension to return to how things were.

Also, the financial issues have been a concern. Students must think about whether they would want to take out a huge loan in the context of the financial situation. There can be a tendency in young people to buy now and pay later. The financial constraints have been a factor. Also, students are reassessing their employment options – do I really want to go through all of this studying, if I won't get a job at the end? This is causing a lot of apprehension in young people. Colleges are, therefore,

struggling across the board with trying to attract and appeal to people – intake for Christian training has reduced. The recruitment of volunteers within churches can also be a struggle, which can impact youth ministry.

Despite these challenges there is hope and a desire to see change. As adults, issues like the above can prevent us from seeing potential in the future. However, young people can be great at seeing beyond such obstacles. We must harness this and learn from them!

**CC:** What recent developments or shifts have you seen in how churches approach mission and youthwork?

**PT:** One of the good things that has happened is that churches have had to review the way they do things and not just focus on what is happening inside the church building. Due to Covid, churches have been forced to do just that. The danger now is, churches return back to their old ways. We must learn and we must continue to adapt by going forwards. It is a great lesson of God being able to use something so negative, such as Covid. 'For God works for the good to those who love Him (Romans 8:28). Churches have been forced to focus outside the building as opposed to just inside. Churches have reviewed their methods and approaches but I believe the danger is returning back to old ways as a default. We must learn from having to adapt and continue in mission.

**CC:** How important is it to equip young people for mission in the 21st century?

**PT:** I believe that Missional Youth are essential for the 21st century. It has been said that young people are the church of tomorrow; well, actually they are the church of today and tomorrow! We must reach out, effectively disciple, whilst encouraging, empowering and equipping. Young people are best placed as missionaries as they can reach people that many churches would struggle to reach.

**CC:** Pete, thank you for sharing your insights and experience.

