

# **‘Youth Ministry in Russia: A case study of two Youth for Christ camps’**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this research a case study was conducted of two Russian camps run by the organization Youth for Christ. The research consisted of four steps – data collection, historical review, youth ministry theory, and conclusions –which were similar to four-step research approaches of Farley and Osmer in practical theology and Clark and Powell in youth ministry theory. This created a practical theology research loop which went from praxis to theory and back to praxis.

Qualitative methods were employed to collect data. Interviews with teenagers and camp leaders and participant observation were used before, during and after the camps to evaluate the process of socialization of teenagers from camp to Youth for Christ (YFC) programs and then the local Protestant church. The study revealed a strong connection between the camp and YFC but a much weaker one between YFC and the church. Most churches had no groups for teenagers and were unprepared to receive the teenagers coming through the YFC programs. Other factors which negatively affected this process were the lack of trained leaders, parents’ fear of Protestant groups, and government bureaucracy.

A historical review of tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet times was conducted to better understand the cultural background behind the researched situation. Youth ministry theory was then used to develop a ‘church teams strategy’ to help churches develop teams of leaders who are equipped to assist teenagers in their faith following camp and Youth for Christ programs. Then returning to the situation, recommendations were made as to how Youth for Christ and other parachurch organizations can help churches in the areas of leadership development, caring relationships, and culturally appropriate methods.

This research makes a contribution to the existing body of knowledge related to qualitative research in practical theology, the Russian Protestant Church and work with teenagers.