Youth Ministry and Adolescent Faith Formation

LifelongFaith Associates

Youth Ministry & Adolescent Faith Formation

Lifelong Faith

<u>Spring 2010 Issue</u>
Faith Formation and the New Technologies and Digital Media

From the Editor

Welcome to the Winter 2009 issue of *Lifelong Faith* with the theme of "Youth Ministry and Adolescent Faith Formation." This issue blends research and theory about ministry with young people with a variety of approaches and strategies for pastoral practice to help you and your church enhance and expand your youth ministry efforts.

Nancy Going in "The Way of Jesus: Adolescent Development as Christological Process" describes a theologically-driven developmental framework which allows every portion of the life cycle to be an exploration of the various aspects of the nature of God. She uses interviews with adolescents to describes the uniqueness of adolescent development from a theological perspective.

"Four Paradigms of Youth Ministry in the Urban Context" by **Fernando Arzola Jr**. analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of three prevalent paradigms in youth ministry today: the traditional, the liberal, and the activist. He proposes a fourth paradigm, prophetic youth ministry, specially suited for the urban context but with applicability to all youth ministry.

Mark DeVries provides a blueprint for developing youth ministry in "Every Church Can Build a Sustainable Youth Ministry." Mark examines two foundational systems for youth ministry: *architecture*—the structures for sustainability, and *atmosphere*—the culture, climate, and ethos that sustain the health of an organization. His article is filled with practical strategies and ideas.

The "Special Report: The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry" is a summary report from the forthcoming book by the same name by **Roland Martinson** and **Wesley Black**. The book reports on the multi-year, ecumenical research project, "The Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry." The research project is noteworthy for its emphasis on the congregational factors (called Faith Assets in the study) that contribute to nurturing youth of vital Christian faith. The study findings identified 44 Faith Assets that contribute to develop maturing faith in young people—including congregational faith and qualities, congregational leadership, youth ministry qualities, and family/household faith.

Consider purchasing multiple copies of this issue for your Youth Ministry and Adolescent Faith Formation Team. Go to www.LifelongFaith.com to order your copies.

I hope you find this issue enriching and helpful!

John Roberto
Editor

The Way of Jesus: Adolescent Development as Christological Process

Nancy Going

I t was Thursday night at workcamp. Nearing the end of a long week of service, the evening program offered a presentation of Jesus' death and resurrection in the form of Stations of the Cross. The stations were designed to help these adolescents and their adult leaders connect their own life experiences with central events of the crucifixion.

There were dice, so that students could throw them as the soldiers did at the foot of the cross. Like the soldiers unable to see the Son of God hanging above them, these students were invited to ponder all that distracts them from seeing Jesus in their daily lives. At another station, 400 workcampers were invited to use red paint and their finger to write their name under the words "Remember Me," as the thief on Jesus' side had once implored Jesus. A sea of adolescents populated the site throughout the evening: sitting, writing and praying. At the end of the evening, the newsprint was filled from side to side and top to bottom with names, and a single sentence gratefully scrawled in the midst of the Robs, Sarahs, Emilys, and Jasons: "Your already know my name."

In a culture rife with both concern for, as well as myths about young people, what do we know about the kind of faith given expression here? How is such faith exemplified in the day-to-day life of a teenager? Does committed Christian faith actually change the look of adolescent development? How could this kind of faith—faith that finds identity in the saving act of Jesus—actually shape and define our understanding of the process of faith formation.

In contrast, both the church and the youth serving community spend much of their energy and attention in the study of troubled adolescents. In fact, the way that many adults view adolescence in general is, well, ominous. Listen to the conversations among parents around you, and the fearful ways they negatively anticipate their child's move into this life phase. Listen to what they believe about adolescence—"it will be difficult, and we need to let them *go off* to find themselves." There remains a marked emphasis in American culture on adolescence as a period of crisis, focused on the individual's solo quest for identity. Unfortunately, adolescent faith development has often been viewed through that hands-off lens.

Nancy Going, PhD serves as the director of the Distributed Learning Children's Youth and Family Masters Degree program at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN. She received her PhD from Luther Seminary in 2006. She has worked in youth ministry for over twenty-five years, and been a youth ministry educator for the last ten. She lives with her husband Art in Plano TX.

However, could such notions in fact be a self-fulfilling prophesy? What if Christian churches could help the rest of American society begin to see adolescence through a different set of lenses. For example, a recent article in *Psychology Today* listing the "ten worst ideas in the history of psychology," described "adolescent angst" as an example of the one of the worst ideas still needing to be exposed. Built on a "faulty biological theory," the struggles of adolescence are not only far from inevitable, but are actually non-existent in many other cultures. There is also documented concern that the misrepresentation of this period of life is the basis for both therapy and the juvenile justice system, and has actually resulted in greater problems for the growth of young people than ever seen before.[1]

It is striking to note that even Christian youth ministers often talk about adolescents with similar fear and negativity. Even these adults who are willing to take on the challenges of leadership in the church on behalf of young people too often believe that they are to step back and expect problems. In fact, much youth ministry literature describes adolescence only in light of psychological theories.

While developmental psychology has been very helpful in its capacity to focus ministry on the specific needs and tasks of an age group, the conversation in youth ministry often engages adolescent development as human development only: identity, individuation, and identity foreclosure versus identity moratorium. Spiritual development is generally discussed only as a layer of application of Erik Erikson's or Robert Kegan's developmental schema, rather than the church claiming the developmental task in any age as created by God. Kenda Dean of Princeton Seminary points out, "Erikson's work has influenced Protestant theology, practical theology in particular, more than any other developmental theorist." (Dean, 12)

One could also argue that perhaps Erikson has influenced ministry with young people more than any theologian as well.

Further, because we begin by thinking about ministry with adolescents based on developmental theory, do we see their faith as somehow "less than" and "not yet" because stages theories necessarily relegate children and youth to lower levels of cognition? Beyond mere social structures that divide adolescents and adults, adolescent faith is viewed as developmentally inadequate and immature faith. Young people are sidelined in the church not just for their lack of faith, but also for the kind of faith they have.

Not only has adolescence left youth alone, but has it robbed the church of one of its spiritual resources: the fervent faith of young people. Adolescents are no longer encouraged to be in the midst of the community—their faith potentially moving adults to remember and re-connect with their own spiritual journeys, but are relegated to the couches of the youth room. Despite the post-modern questions about the validity and applicability of developmental stages, those who work with youth often carry heavy cultural and psychological images of adolescence and look through those fairly limited—even negative lenses at those they serve.[2] Further, when such stage frameworks are reinforced by those who work with youth, we infuse our already heavily age-segmented ecclesiologies with an underlying concept that inherently limits the church's ability to see young people as full members of the body of Christ.

While the landmark National Study of Youth and Religion (*Soul Searching*, 2005) provided some data on what they identified as "devoted" youth, these young people were described primarily by the sociological factors shaping them and their religious life such as parent religiosity, relationship with parents, parental marital status, parental education, organized activities, religious tradition, higher desired attendance, close friends, peer influences, gender, and race. The study identified these 8 percent of "devoted" young people as exhibiting qualitatively different faith than did the majority of adolescents who consented to be interviewed. (Smith, 110) However, the NYSR study was not able to examine the nature of this "devoted" adolescent faith or the potential developmental gains produced by adolescent spirituality.

Church History Tells a Different Story

By contrast, the historical reality is that renewal movements in the church often began as youth revivals, marked by a depth of faith not accounted for in developmental theory. In a recent lecture, historian Douglas Strong pointed to the importance of adolescent faith, not just for adolescents who find themselves in it, but also for the church as a whole. "What has been little noticed is that, throughout American religious history, church renewal and spiritual revitalization have come by way of youth. Youth are also the ones who led the way to a spiritually revived and regenerated church." (Strong,

83) This reality has gotten lost in the shuffle, but according to Strong, " in the Great Awakening of the 1730's and 1740's, the importance of young converts has not been sufficiently mentioned in historical accounts of the period, although it is a prominent theme in the primary documents" (Strong, 84). Strong's historical corrective provides a stark contrast to the current expectations of the role of adolescents in the life of the church.

Alongside the recent groundbreaking global study of spiritual development by the Search Institute, there has been recent psychological acknowledgement of the role of the spiritual in the human developmental process.

> Systematic collection and analysis of such narratives as well as refined interview techniques that permit respectful dialogues with young children consistently support the understanding that children do have religious or spiritual experiences and that such experiences are not just due to the influence of a specific type of nurture to which they were exposed in their families. Rather the ways in which children experience their social and natural environment seem to imply something like a transcendent overtone or dimension. (Schweitzer, 93)

It All Depends on Where You Begin

Has a predominantly psychological approach to adolescent development in fact limited our theology? Can we declare and teach the transforming work and person of Jesus Christ as Savior when we continue to talk about development as a separate biological and psychological process from spiritual growth? Do we as Christians actually claim the biblical assertion: "But to all who receive him, who believe in his name have the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13, ESV).

Youth ministry, by embracing a predominantly psychological developmental approach to adolescence, minimizes the theological nature of human life. But what if those who nurture faith development in young people were to claim the notion that the various phases of the human life cycle could be a "sign," as in the Gospel of John, each pointing us to experience unique aspects of God's nature, and the way of Jesus.[3] If so, along with observing and working a theological frame for each life phase, what if the church were to claim development itself as a process of God, progressively revealing to us God's nature and being, as we are biologically and psychologically most receptive to comprehending and taking them in?

This is a very different picture of development. As Christians, we can see development as a gift given by God for the purpose of drawing us nearer to God, not just a biological or psychological stage. It could be that each stage provides us with unique learning about the nature of God—to be absorbed and integrated into our very selves and faith as well as providing the momentum for psychological growth.

A Study of Committed Christian Adolescents

This article reports on research with young people designed to explore and test out the notion that persons in any phase of life are actually engaged in experiencing and exploring discrete aspects of the nature of God. In order to see the validity of a theological framework in action in the adolescent life phase, one would have to listen to young people who are committed Christians. Will adolescents of committed faith point to the theological emphases of adolescent development, and could the church actually use theology—specific theological themes reflecting various aspects of the nature of God- to explore the content of development?

Lutheran theology was chosen as the initial framework for adolescent theological themes, due to Luther's focus on the work of God in everyday life, and because of the historical twist that took place in the Reformation's concentration on the self in relationship to God. Luther focused his writing in a pastoral direction: on the living faith of real people. All these factors resonate well with what we do know about adolescents.

Three Lutheran theological themes were chosen to ground this look at adolescent development from a theological perspective: *simul justus et peccator* or the Christian is always at the same time saint and sinner; justifying faith as knowing, trusting, and affirming; and the *larvae Dei* or the masks of God. It was hoped that these descriptive themes about the nature of God and humans in relationship to God would find

expression in conversations with adolescents about their faith.

The churches identified and studied in "The Study of Exemplary Congregations with Youth Ministry" (EYM) provided a controlled sample of young people. Youth leaders from several of these congregations whose young people had scored higher on a measure of Mature Christian Faith were contacted for the names of some of their most committed youth.[4] This study consisted of conducting in-depth interviews with twelve adolescents from four EYM churches. In addition, a dozen other students at Christian high schools in two focus groups were interviewed to triangulate the data. There was a complete qualitative theme analysis of the interviews.

These twelve disciples were all from small town mid-sized or suburban churches of a variety of denominational affiliations.[5] They had all been a part of churches for their entire lives, and they all reported parents who were faithful Christians. Although there were wide individual variations in the faith experiences of these twelve disciples, the content of their conversations about faith—what was naturally on their mind—their "faith energy"—was remarkably similar.[6] The results of this qualitative study of committed Christian adolescents showed them engaged in a significant Christological process, deeply identifying with the identity and work of Jesus.

The Study Results

After the interviews were processed they were analyzed to hear common themes. The primary one was: *Faith is a living relationship with Jesus.* There were several ideas that clustered together to create this theme, but it was by far the most concentrated topic of their conversations. Luther's theme of justifying faith as knowing, trusting and affirming (all relational attributes, according to Luther was the most prominent topic of their conversation. These were hands down, the expressions of a newly re-defined relationship with God for all twelve of these adolescents. Several said: "When I was younger, I knew *about* God. Now I know *God* because I know what Jesus did for me." Expressed in a variety of ways, the concept of a newly shaped relationship with Jesus is the single most significant theme to emerge from the interview data. These twelve disciples affirmed this theme as the most important part of what they knew about God, and distinct from how they may have understood God before. This is how some of them talked about it:

Carrie: *I was a baby Christian then. Back then, I got the concepts like Jesus died on the cross to save our sins, but that was about it. Now I understand more about who God is as a person. I've grown more to understand him. I've gotten to know him.*

Lindsay: *After becoming a part of Trinity, we have our youth classes for the juniors and we'd hear talks from the youth leaders, and you would listen to those, and be like, wow, that really does make sense. and I went to a few Christian camps too. Sixth grade I went to a horseback riding camp, and I really didn't understand the whole relationship thing quite well yet. And in 8th grade, I went to camp for teenagers. It was through a group we have in our town and I went to camp, and that was just a really good time to get away from everything in this world and focus on God. It just kind of helped me to figure out what it means to have a relationship with God.*

Not Just Any Relationship

While each of the twelve talked about knowing God relationally, all of them also reflected a remarkably intimate relationship. Even more, their experiences with God had all generated an expectation of a level of intimacy with God that was noteworthy and even astonishing. All the different ways that they talked about this is certainly another facet of adolescent faith Here is some of their testimony about the shape of that bond:

Adam: *He put it in words that I understood for the first time, and something just clicked, that you have to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I'd never heard that before. I am sure I had heard it, but that was the first time that I heard it and understood it. Right there, while he was doing the invitation I never raised my hand, I was pretty shy, especially in middle school I was pretty insecure, I never liked going in front of people, but I accepted Christ right there in my seat. I started crying and stuff, I prayed. I wanted this relationship that he was talking about, and I want to go to heaven, I want to be a better person, he definitely poured his Holy Spirit into me right then and there. It was an instantaneous thing.*

Alicia: *I love spending time with him, I love doing my quiet times. I love praying, I'm not that good at*

it, I don't always remember to, but it makes me feel a lot better.

Ruth: *So there have been times when I am like, "Lord, I know what I need to do, I just can't do it. I need your strength so I can focus on it." So that constant communication with God is a perpetual encouragement, and so it's also the way that you keep that line open. God talks to you even when you don't ask him for things. So I'll be walking down the hall, and he'll be like, "Ahem, that person over there." So prayer is just a constant thing.*

Lindsay: *At first I thought God was just the one who sat above and just watched us, but the whole relationship thing is like having him here with you. He's here to be with you and he's feeling all the emotions that you are at the same time, and he's like your best friend and he's the person who's going to understand you the best, better than you know yourself, and he's just really important to have as a friend, and he's like your livelihood in a way, because he's the one who can breathe life into you when you don't feel like you have any.*

Faith as Transformation

Not only did these young people talk about their newly re-shaped relationship with Jesus, but they also talked about that relationship as transformational in its very essence. They celebrated the ways that faith had driven and focused their psychological growth.

Adam: *It's kind like a voice just up there in my head and over a gradual period of time, I began to humble myself extremely. I'd constantly humiliate myself in public, so you know; I'd have a humbling process every now and then, just right then and there. Over a gradual period of time, your cockiness level just drops, I know mine did, because I was a pretty cocky kid, and it was just about until about two years ago that I really had a huge attitude change in the way that I'd carry myself. so that's another huge change in my life is the humility factor. It's still something that I work towards every day, because you can never be too humble. Jesus said that the humble would inherit the earth.*

When asked, "Are there parts of what you know of the Christian story that you connect with particularly?" Adam responded with:

Probably Jesus not being accepted. Just because of where I am spiritually. I'm not included in too much socially, because of that. Because people see me as... They know I'm cool and everything, especially the people that I work with, we've got great relationships, but they know I'm not going to do anything if I go to parties, and they don't want just this corpse sitting around, not doing anything, and plus I don't really like going to anything like that, because there is no reason for me to expose myself to that, or to just go if you're not going to do anything, its just pointless, you shouldn't do anything, I'm kinda sounding bad right now. I think its definitely he wasn't accepted, and that he would set aside all of his powers and resist urges to flex his muscles and show off, and that kinda gets me, and that I can relate with.

Ruth: *And so when I get back this year, our school is blessed again with an eclectic bunch, and while you wish you wouldn't have some of the diversity, regardless of personality, I try to remember that Jesus was the God of the outcast, and it reminds me that I need to try to love this person, and just not hating them would be a step in the right direction, and I've really been trying to work on that in living out my faith.*

Eliza: *A Christian is to me a person who believes that Christ is the Son of God, and actively tries to become more Christ-like. Being a Christian is unique, because you are not searching for Nirvana or enlightenment, you are searching to become more like Christ. My tendencies are not towards Christ, which makes it a lot harder, but as a Christian you are trying to develop that meekness of spirit and that passion for others that allows you to be there for your brothers, and stand against the grain. All those qualities that Christ possessed.*

Here's how Kenda Dean has theorized about what these disciples described:

Our identities take shape in relationships that mirror back to us "who we are" and the kind of person we are becoming, but not just any relationship will do. Ultimately identity requires the self-confirming presence of reliable love.....and when we do find it, this authentic love reorders our view of the world and our place in it. (Dean, 55-56)

In contrast to the limits of an exclusively psychological adolescent search for identity, our theological frames have long accounted for such development in the life of the believer. " A central point of patristic Christology was that God became man, took flesh in order to redeem humanity to a new human nature in Christ" (Newlands, 108). While Christian practitioners and youth ministry leaders have called again and again over the last half century for baptismal identity to have a voice in the how we minister with adolescents, this data would in fact suggest that faithful adolescents are very much interested in seeing identity as unfolding from their newfound relationship with Jesus.

Adolescence as Christological Exploration

Of the theme used as a theological frame for this study, Luther's "justifying faith as knowing, affirming, trusting" was clearly the unique theological expression that claimed the focus of adolescent faith energy.

> "I am my faith." (Julie)
> "I am a Christian." (Mark)

Luther wrote that justifying faith has three areas of activity: knowing, affirming, and trusting. In exploring these three aspects of faith, we can further understand the remarkably Christological nature of adolescent development. The amount of "faith energy" displayed by these adolescents around these three activities was the central finding in the theme analysis. Their faith journey at this point is remarkably wrapped up in allowing these notions about what faith *is* and *does* unfold into reality in their lives.

The reason, Luther asserts that people don't believe faith justifies is "because they don't know what faith is" (McGrath, 111). Luther used the term "justifying faith as knowing, trusting and affirming" to describe the kind of relational faith that these twelve adolescents were so excited to have received. This phrase does not automatically translate for contemporary ears, but allow the description that follows and the words of the twelve committed Christians to identify important aspects of a Christ-centered focus in faith development.

Beginning with Knowing

A historically significant part of Luther's theological breakthrough came in the way that Luther approached Jesus Christ. Luther's focus on justifying faith led the way for a discovery of history, of the self, and provided a fresh Christological language:[7]

> . . . first of all from the standpoint of life-experience: First Luther's own, and then that of the believer. We know Christ only as we know what he has done for us—hence the work is key to understanding the person. Faith in him is not mere intellectual assent, but the thankful, confident, trusting response of one's whole self to God's live in the midst of our won estrangement and pain. (Houlen, 581)

These adolescents talked about their relationship with Jesus as the significant appreciation to emerge from their varied recent experiences of God. They expressed new understanding of the reality that God loved them and that they now know Jesus. Their Christology is also apparent in how frequently they expressed, "God speaks to me." Even though they had all grown up in the church, if they understood and experienced that Jesus had died "for me," it was not real before for many of them prior to this. This is just the kind of personal knowledge of Christ that Luther described.

> Adam: *He [the speaker] put it in words that I understood for the first time, and something just clicked, that you have to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I'd never heard that before. I am sure I had heard it, but that was the first time that I heard it and understood it.*

> Lauren: *For me, when I was younger, having God was just an abstract concept, and it wasn't really that real. It was just kind of like how we dream about talking horses or something like that when we were younger. It was just something that just really didn't make sense. And as I said, I wasn't a big fan of going to church, and pretty much the only reason I would go is to socialize with my friends. And then when I moved and I realized that I don't have my friends, its just me alone, and I realized that there was just something missing in my heart, and I felt really incomplete, and then heard about God, well I had heard about him before, but I heard what he was trying to get me to*

hear for a really long time and now its kind of like he's always there when I am down.

Biblical scholar, Richard Peace wrote at length about this phenomenon. He noted that Christians have often shied away from acknowledging the importance of faith that knows that God has come "for me" as a distinct step in the process of faith.[8] Not only can adolescence be an exploration of new personal information about God, but for these twelve, that "for me" relationship has been incorporated into their self-understanding, and shaped (even become) their very identity. Julie said:

Just who I am has a lot to do with my faith. I'm pretty conservative. I'm against a lot of things, like sex before marriage and drinking, and lot of that makes up my faith, and my values and that's just who I am. My faith is just who I am pretty much. My faith is just so much a part of who I am that it's me.

The analysis of the interviews indicates several ways that this new understanding developed: several talked about a gradual opening of their eyes, some experienced a type of Damascus road experience either in the context of a church event or a negative life experience. Eleven of the twelve pointed toward an established pattern of personal prayer and engagement with Scripture that appears to have provided additional depth to their connection with God. However, this relationship with God: knowing that Jesus died "for me" is the lens that these adolescents now use to view themselves and the world. This is a critical part of their functional Christology and is at the center of their identity formation. "For me" means *I am* the work of Jesus."

Moving from Knowing to Affirming

The second move in Luther's description of faith is from knowing to affirming. Luther described affirming as "Faith that is not just about believing that something is true. It is being prepared to act on that belief and rely on it" (McGrath, 112).

In the interviews with these twelve disciples, adolescence is not as much about the right date for the prom as it is about how these newfound theological insights play out in the way that they live. They show remarkable interest in seeing the world as the setting for living out their faith.

The twelve talked about some aspect of this frequently in themes that focused on "Faith is living it," and "Faith makes moral choices." They displayed a profound engagement with this piece of a newfound Christological understanding. The following quotation from Travis deserves repeating, because it so deeply expresses the power and centrality of a public affirmation of faith in life experience:

He (Travis' youth minister) helped me and it showed me that out of the parts of my life, that's where I found comfort, and the people from my secular life, they just like ignore it after a few minutes, and like it says in Matthew 5:12, Blessed are those who are persecuted for me, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, more than just being Christian, I've had an experience where I've been persecuted, and God's proud of me, and it wasn't so much "poor me" any more, it was like, "I stood up for you" and "I'm going to keep on going because I'm a disciple," not that anything ever goes wrong, and to have a big big challenge was important for me and to overcome that.

For Travis, faith also became real in his witness of "living it" despite the negative social consequences. In addition the desire expressed by several of the twelve to have a community of faith that is about "accountability" is another facet of this affirming faith.

Moving from Affirming to Trusting

Finally, for Luther, faith is "being prepared to put one's trust in the promises of God, and in the integrity of the God who made those promises" (McGrath, 88). This facet of faith as learning to trust, and focusing considerable energy on the nature of the one in whom trust is placed was repeated by these students again and again throughout the interviews. The frequency of these comments confirmed a new understanding of the very nature of the one who can be trusted: God was described as "best friend, father, counselor, always there, love." In addition the interviews reflected numerous instances where these adolescents built conversation around learning to let go and trust this God who can be trusted.

Julie: *I don't know, when something is getting me down, or I am stressed out, I can just be like, "Okay, just chill out, God is with you." You can realize that, God is with you it will all be okay.*

Amanda: *Everyone always says that your parents will always be there for you, but I really have to contradict that, I really don't think that they are always going to be there for you, there are times when my parents aren't there for me, and there's only one person I can go to, its not my friends its not my boyfriend, its not my family, its God and he's the only one who's always going to be there for me, and he's the only one who's going to love me no matter, what, and sometimes, its hard to accept the choice he makes, but then you have to know that he sees the bigger picture of things, no matter what I'm doing.*

I've never been one to trust people, I'm so skeptical, beyond you're imagination, because of my past, I'm used to people judging me, so I have to judge them before, I've got to stop them, I'm trying to get over that, but it's been very hard for me learn to trust God, because I've always shut out people, I would never let anyone get close to me, I'm always afraid they are going to hurt me or judge me, so I judge them first, which is very wrong, but learning to trust God, I think accepting myself was a big part of learning to trust God. And that was the next step in my faith. I had to get over that one boundary, I had to trust God, I had to give everything to him, I was not giving God everything, I was giving him my prayers, that's about it. If you can give up your biggest fear to God, that's when you really trust him. That's when you really let God take over you life, and that's when he's in charge of everything you do, and that's when you take that step of faith, and you put your most fearful thing in him that's how it should be.

All of the students applied the commitment to trust God consistently and directly as they face change and the future. Ruth used it as one more thing that she needed to tell before her interview ended:

Actually my favorite passage in the Bible is Psalm 91, that whole thing of God's protection. That is one thing that is constantly coming back to me. That God is always there to protect us. Even when you are in the pit of the viper, he will protect you, and that is one thing that has just pervaded my live and faith, that I really have nothing to fear. God is always there, and he will never fail me even though fail myself, and I fail him. I really don't have to worry about it. I think it always comes back to the point where when I think of the Psalms, and know

that he's done it before. Even though my life is perfectly unique, God has sculpted it, and God knows what's going to happen.

This is not assent to an abstract set of doctrines. Rather, according to Luther, it is like a "wedding ring" pointing to mutual commitment and union between Christ and the believer. It is the response of the whole person of the believer to God, which in turn leads to the real and personal presence of Christ in the believer. (McGrath, 100)

This aspect of Luther's description of faith as "union with Christ" parallels the Orthodox understanding of "theosis" (God's presence in us). It is a fascinating counterbalance to the focus on forensic justification that post-reformation justification theology emphasized. Luther believed that "Christ is really and personally ("ontically") present in the believer in faith, and that the believer in turn really (ontically) participates by faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ" (Braaten and Jenson, 78). Christ as *ontologically* present in faith means real participation in God. This theological expression finds expression in the functional Christology that characterizes the faith expression of these adolescents.

In fact, Travis described this aspect of justifying faith as:

I can laugh about it, because it's part of who I am, and faith isn't like separate parts of my life, my life is constantly like, pray at this time, and don't pray at this time, my life is constantly like, "God what do you want me doing right now?"

But just that everything I think and everything that I do is God centered, as opposed to before when it was just a part, and now it's all of it.

These twelve were able to articulate how their new insights about God moved them developmentally. They went on to declare the many ways this new knowledge of God has created change in them. When these three aspects of the nature of justifying faith are viewed all together, one wonders if this new Christological exploration is actually what drives further self-understanding and development. For them, "faith unites the believer to Christ; I get what is Christ's" (McGrath, 111).

Implications

In churches, where we often provide ministry driven by our fears of losing youth, a greater question needs to be asked. What if youth stay, and we never let the uninhibited, unencumbered power of their newly formed or re-formed relationships with Jesus shape and remind adults? The results of this study have implications for the faith formation, for youth ministry in churches, and for the very ways that we as Christians think about the process of human development.

Claiming a Full Christology

"You already know me name." If young people can talk about a relationship with Jesus that shapes their very selves, transforms them, and allows them to move from a focus on self to the ability to genuinely care for others, then can Christians also claim faith in a Savior who does no less? Can Christians talk in very real terms about what it means to see development as a function of relationship with our Creator? Does our Christology suffer from our desire to claim the therapeutic culture of growth toward the psychological goal of wholeness? Like it or not, adolescence is the most recognized (and studied) of all the developmental stages. The results of this study would indicate once again that the faith of young people can and should lead us.

The fact that there was minimal conversation by these adolescents around Luther's theological notion of "at the same time saint and sinner" could also indicate that young people are engaged in this Christological focus to the exclusion of other understanding about the nature of God. These are theological ideas that we likely absorb into our selves in other phases of life.

Re-Claiming Adolescence

While developmental theorists like Erikson, Piaget, Kegan, and Fowler all need to be part of the conversation about working with persons of different ages, this research points to the value of Christians claiming a theological framework for development, and that development is by its very nature about the human in relationship with God, and not just all about us. This insight also provides important tools for shaping ministry in the church.

One of the goals of this project is help parents see their adolescents through the lens of an active God, rather than a lens of fear. Those working with youth are often stymied by how little even church-attending parents realize about their importance in the process of faith formation and their children.

There is a great need to help parents normalize and expect the behaviors that are the signs of Christian commitment as a part of development. Many parents spend their energy during these years focused on fear and keeping their children busy. This kind of committed faith in adolescence simply amazes adults, but it doesn't need to. If the adolescent life phase is all about God's calling young people into a reshaped relationship, and if that moves their child into empathy and a sense of the needs of others, parents need help looking for and affirming *this*, not rebellion.

This will mean supporting parents to encourage their own development. As a result of this study, helping to sustain parents in supporting the faith of their adolescents to new levels of commitment should be an important focus for youth ministry. There are several important understandings to teach parents about adolescent faith based on this study:

1. We can't take adolescents seriously unless we take religious *experience* seriously.
2. Help your children pay attention to all the ways that they are seeing God come to them.
3. Never underestimate the power you are having on the faith of your kids.
4. See the other sirens in their lives as just that. Look for and affirm the ways that adolescents may be connecting with God in spite of themselves.
5. Don't be embarrassed about the cost of discipleship.
6. Help expose them to the great needs of others in the world. It will aid in their development.
7. Allow their faith to lead you. They have a lot to teach you about loving God at this time of their lives.
8. Anticipate changes in the "faith energy" of your child, as his or her faith develops.
9. Let your adolescent's faith expressions teach you about how God is working in the world.

Could it be that part of the reason that adolescence has become such a turbulent and elongated process in our culture, is because we are not looking for, encouraging, or accompanying this

kind of transforming activity of God in the lives of young people?

Re-Claiming Adolescents

The practice of hearing and telling faith stories is a tool for youth ministry, and for the work of helping the faith of young people shape the entire congregation.[9] No one had ever asked these twelve disciples to tell their stories before. Adults working with youth can and should build ministry around the questions that will draw young people (and people of all ages in their churches) into reflecting on and telling the story of God's action in their lives. It is in reflection on faith stories that we gain a picture of development that is God's creative action and gift in the lives of adolescents. It is in sharing those stories that we build real faith communities. For those from churches with a history of testimony, exploring faith stories with people of all ages will help re-claim that history with a new purpose.

Finally, the more we teach stage theories, the more we will continue to relegate adolescents to a "less than" role in the church. A theologically-driven developmental framework allows every portion of the life cycle to be an exploration of the various aspects of the nature of God and allows each part of human life and experience to be equal and valuable. The exploration of specific God-themes that are "signs" pointing to Jesus in childhood become no less important to the whole church than the unique foci of "faith-energy" of old age. We can genuinely be different but equal. We are all exploring the nature of God. We can remind one another what we might have forgotten about how God works. We can encourage ecclesiologies based on the appreciation for the theological strengths of each age, rather than on the limitations of stages. Development can become the way of Jesus.

> Until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ. (Ephesians 4: 13-15, ESV)

End Notes

[1] Epstein, Robert. "The Loose Screw Awards: the Ten Worst Ideas in Psychotherapy." *Psychology Today*, Jan/Feb, 2005. P. 58-62.

[2] These questions are the primary thrust of Fredrick Schweitzer's book *The Postmodern Life Cycle* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004).

[3] Trokan, John, "Stages of the Marital and Family Life Cycle: Marital Miracles." *Pastoral Psychology*, 46(4), 281-295. I was first exposed to the idea of life as pointing to God in this article by John Trokan. Trokan uses the frame of the family life cycle from Family Systems theory and believes that each stage of life offers varied opportunities for encountering God's revealed presence. He encourages perceiving the growth demanded by each stage in the life cycle not just as hurdle to be mastered but rather as "the work of the Spirit to cultivate love." He asks if the phases of a family's life aren't designed by God to point us to various aspects of God's very nature. "There are those who hope for physical wonder within their life transitions, but fail to perceive the faith-relational invitation of these events and stages." I wondered if that idea could be equally applicable to the human life cycle. One ideological value is the way that such a framework frees us from the greater than/less than and questionable end goals of stage frameworks.

[4] The Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry (EYM) study was done by representatives of seven denominations under the auspices of a Lilly grant, and was completed in 2003. It sought to identify the characteristics of congregations whose young people scored higher on levels of mature Christian faith.

[5] The EYM Study sought to identify exemplary youth ministry practices in churches from seven quite different denominations: Lutheran, Southern Baptist, Assemblies of God, Presbyterian, Methodist, Roman Catholic, and Covenant.

[6] I use the term "faith energy" to describe what these twelve adolescents talked about the most frequently and freely.

[7] Luther scholars trace his having been immersed in nominalism as a philosophical frame during Luther's years at Erfurt. Nominalist influences would have encouraged the interest in the particularity of individual faith for Luther. See "Martin Luther" in *Jesus in Thought, History and Culture*, Leslie Houlen, ed. (Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2003), p. 581.

[8] Peace described "for me" experience as a kind of experience that takes place when a person is

confronted with reality as it really is. ...This is what James Loder would call a "convictional experience." In that moment caught up in this experience, suddenly a person "knows." No argument or proofs are necessary to understand that one has encountered God. The experience is self-validating. It is its own proof. *Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve*. (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1999) p.77.

[9] Dorie Baker's *Doing Girlfriend Theology* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005) also points to faith stories are a remarkable tool for nurturing, celebrating, and exploring spiritual development.

Works Cited

Braaten Carl and Robert Jenson. *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther.* Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1998.

Dean, Kenda Creasy. *Practicing Passion*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

Houlen, Leslie, editor. "Martin Luther." *Jesus in Thought, History and Culture*. Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2003.

McGrath, Alistair E. *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Blackwell, 2001.

Newlands, George. "Christology." *Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*. Alan Richardson and John Bowden, editors. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983.

Schweitzer, Fredrick. "Differences between Religion and Spirituality in Children and Adolescents." *Encyclopedia of Spiritual and Religious Development*. George Scarlett and Elizabeth Dowlen, editors. Los Angeles: Sage, 2005.

Smith, Christian with Melinda Lundquist Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Strong, Douglas. "A Holy Passion and a Holy Temper: Spiritual Revival Movements as Empowerment for Today's Youth." *Longing for God: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Lectures on Youth, Church and Culture.

Four Paradigms of Youth Ministry in the Urban Context

Fernando Arzola Jr.

ontrary to popular belief, urban youth do not constitute a monolithic group. There is no one urban youth voice. Furthermore, there is no one model of urban youth ministry. Urban youth ministries have in common only three identifying components: (1) they are Christian, (2) they are located in the city, and (3) they minister to youth. Beyond this, urban youth ministries are as varied as the churches in the body of Christ. Nonetheless, because of these three common components, urban youth ministries reflect a unique stream within the dynamic and ever-changing river of youth ministries. Let us briefly examine three urban youth worker archetypes and the ministries in which they are engaged.

Anthony is the youth pastor of a theologically conservative church. He is primarily committed to the spiritual formation of youth. He prepares weekly Bible studies and youth outreach events, and has infused a dynamic spirit into worship. Anthony sees himself as a pastor to the youth. He understands that the teens in his youth ministry come from poor families with social needs. He also recognizes the importance of personal and academic growth among youth. These matters, however, are secondary to their spiritual formation. For Anthony, the primary goal of the youth ministry is to bring youth into the Christian faith and to help them grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Michelle is the director of youth ministry at a theologically liberal church. She is primarily committed to the personal development of youth. She prepares weekly lesson plans which address adolescent issues, promote diversity and provide for rap sessions allowing the group to discuss teen-related concerns. Michelle sees herself as a friend to the youth. She uses the Bible when preparing her lesson plans, but primarily as a reference. While she does not teach about the Christian faith, Michelle believes that it is most important to help teens develop a healthy spirituality and respect for all religious traditions. She is concerned about the needs of people in the city

Fernando Arzola Jr. Ph.D. is a Associate Dean, College of Arts and Colleges and Director of Interdisciplinary Studies at Nyack College, New York City. His areas of specialization include religious education, youth ministry, urban ministry, and interdisciplinary studies. He holds a Ph.D. from Fordham University. He is the author of *Toward a Prophetic Youth Ministry: Theory and Praxis in Urban Context*. (InterVarsity Press, 2008) and *Foundations for Excellence* (with Denise Hirschlein, Tapestry Press, 2002).

and encourages the teens to become involved in charity work. Yet, for Michelle, the primary goal of the youth ministry is to help youth develop healthy self-esteem while becoming aware of their civic responsibilities.

John is the minister of youth at a church whose theology promotes a social gospel. He is primarily committed to social change. He prepares lessons which focus on empowerment issues, economic concerns, and social engagement. John sees himself as an advocate for the youth. He certainly believes education is important and recognizes the significance of youth developing healthy self-esteem. The spiritual growth of youth is also important. However, for John, the primary goal of youth ministry is to empower and equip youth to recognize and respond to social and systemic injustices which confront teens as well as to encourage them to promote social change.

While these three types of youth workers reflect important streams within urban youth ministry, the overemphasis on any one tends to nurture a limited and unbalanced adolescent spirituality. Furthermore, each youth ministry tends to give birth to and nurture a particular type of teenager. In line with the ministries describe above, I have encountered three general urban Christian youth archetypes. First is the **dogmatic** Christian youth archetype. These teenagers are loyal to denominational/spiritual traditions and understand Jesus as Lord and Savior. They read the Scriptures through a tradition-specific interpretive lens (Evangelical, Pentecostal, Charismatic, Baptist, Catholic, etc.). Second is the **intellectual** Christian youth archetype. These teenagers are not necessarily more intelligent than the others; they are simply more oriented toward rational process. These teenagers understand Jesus as a good person and a wise sage. They read the Scriptures metaphorically. Finally is the **socially engaged** Christian youth archetype. These teenagers tend to be strongly enthnocentric, understanding Jesus as a radical social activist fighting for all cultural groups. They read the Scriptures from a social-justice perspective.

Questions to Ponder

Reflect on the youth ministry in which you've been involved: What archetype did it tend to birth or nurture: dogmatic, intellectual or social engaged Christian youth?

Four Paradigms of Youth Ministry in the Urban Context

The following is an attempt to present a typological analysis of four urban youth ministry paradigms. It is my hope that this may contribute to increased reflection and dialogue regarding youth ministry in the urban context.

In *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice*, Joe Holland and Peter Henriot present a three-part model towards better understanding social justice theory: 1) the traditional perspective, 2) the liberal perspective, and 3) the radical perspective. Each perspective, they argue, serves as a lens through which social justice is viewed. Because ministry in the urban context is so entwined with social engagement, I have adapted Holland and Henriot's helpful model to create a typology of urban youth ministries.

In my own work I have observed four paradigms of youth ministry in the urban context: 1) the **traditional** youth ministry paradigm, 2) the **liberal** youth ministry paradigm, 3) the **activist** youth ministry paradigm, and 4) the **prophetic** youth ministry paradigm. These paradigms reflect different ways of understanding and ministering to youth in the urban setting. Each reflects a specific ministerial worldview with its own philosophical and theological assumptions.

Like all typologies, this one creates ideal classifications that can become overgeneralized and even problematic at times. Some traits may even overlap among the paradigms. Yet typological classifications can also help us see and better understand the fundamental differences among paradigms. Furthermore, the four paradigms may be applicable in other settings, particularly in some rural settings, where economic and social justice needs are especially acute.

Understanding these paradigms is useful to both youth ministry educators and urban youth workers. These paradigms offer youth ministry educators insights about four different approaches within the spectrum of urban youth ministries. They will also have a better appreciation of the breadth of urban youth ministry thought. Urban youth workers may find these paradigms helpful in order to re-examine their own philosophical and theological under-pinnings, engaging in ministerial re-evaluation and developing more holistic youth ministry programming.

---

1. The Traditional Youth Ministry Paradigm

The traditional youth ministry paradigm is one of the most common in the urban context. The emphasis in this paradigm is on *youth ministry* in the urban context. That is, its primary purpose is developing a ministry-centered program for urban youth. Each model has a primary question when evaluating the ministry. Because of its emphasis on programs, the evaluative question for this paradigm is, "How effective are the programs in the youth ministry?" This question is ministerial in nature. It focuses on the programs *for* youth. The focus and assumptions of this model begin with *ministry programs* and then how they may be addressed to youth. The traditional urban youth minister asks, *What programs/ curriculum are best or most effective for our youth?*

The primary concern for the traditional youth ministry paradigm is, first and foremost, the spiritual needs of urban youth. Therefore, traditional youth ministries will focus on spiritual formation through their particular tradition-specific perspective (Evangelical, Pentecostal, Charismatic, Baptist, Orthodox, Catholic, etc.). Programmatically, this is manifested in Bible studies, worship/liturgical services, religious education, Sunday school—all the "spiritual" components of youth ministry. Traditional youth ministry retreats are developed, presumably, to help urban youth nurture their relationships with Christ.

The use of a guiding principle is essential to every philosophy of youth ministry. For the traditional youth ministry, the root principle is *discipleship*, to become disciples of Christ. Naturally, the issue here with the traditional paradigm is not the emphasis on discipleship, which should be present in any good Christian ministry paradigm, but the *exclusive* emphasis on discipleship as primarily an individual, personal change with little impact in the social realm.

The traditional youth ministry is based on an ideology of *biology*, a growing healthy body—youth ministry as the Body of Christ. Therefore, the traditional paradigm believes the body of youth ministry, as an institution, and its traditions, should be preserved.

Holland and Henriot explore how conflict is addressed by the various perspectives. How does the traditional youth ministry respond to conflict? Because of its commitment to tradition and order, the traditional youth ministry tends to avoid or silence conflict. At its worst, conflict is viewed as inappropriate, wrong, and even deviant. Therefore, the traditional response to conflict tends to be "authoritarian." (Holland and Henriot, 31-45)

At its best, the traditional youth ministry challenges us to be rooted in the apostolic teachings of the early church, with Jesus Christ as the foundation. At its worst, it is more concerned with winning souls, indoctrination into a specific tradition and engaging in spiritual warfare at the expense of addressing the social injustices of this world.

Each paradigm is exemplified in the New Testament. While no one group can fully represent the paradigm, it serves as a helpful reference for better understanding each of the typologies. The traditional youth ministry is most exemplified in the Pharisees. At first glance this comparison appears insulting, but a broader understanding of the Pharisees is in order. The Pharisees represented a political-religious Jewish group who believed in separating themselves from their non-Jewish neighbors. And, while they have gotten a bad rap over the centuries, the Pharisees were faithful Jews, committed to the teachings of the Torah and struggling to live a life of moral purity—not unlike biblical Christians today. However, the Pharisees, at least how the New Testament characterizes this group, had a tendency toward legalism, a literal

interpretation of the Scriptures, and a strict, almost fanatical observance of the teachings of the Law.

2. The Liberal Youth Ministry Paradigm

The liberal youth ministry is very popular with mainline denominational churches, particularly within middle-class and upper-middle class neighborhoods. This is also seen in inner-city neighborhoods with churches that are led by theologically liberal pastors. The emphasis of this paradigm is on *compassionate ministry* for urban youth. That is, its primary purpose is developing a felt-needs ministry-centered programming for urban youth. This paradigm begins with the *felt-needs* of youth and then addresses them through youth ministry programs.

Because of the liberal youth ministry's compassionate perspective, its evaluative question is *How are the needs of urban youth effectively being met?* This question is psychological and developmental in nature. It focuses on the needs *of* youth.

The primary concern for the liberal youth ministry is the personal and emotional needs of urban youth. Therefore, programmatically, the liberal youth ministry will tend to offer interrelational and intrarelational therapeutic programs. These programs include support groups, mentoring, family-based initiatives, intergenerational activities, trips, arts and crafts, and choirs. Liberal youth ministry retreats are developed to help urban youth better understand themselves and their uniqueness and nurture a healthier self-awareness.

The guiding principle for the liberal youth ministry is *growth*. Philosophically, the metaphor of growth is rooted in Progressive Education. Are urban youth growing in a healthy manner?

The liberal youth ministry is based on an ideology of *evolution*. That is, youth ministries need to change and adapt. Therefore, the liberal paradigm believes that youth ministry, as an institution, needs to be reformed.

How does the liberal youth ministry tend to respond to conflict? It understands conflict as part of the evolutionary process for ministry and relationships. Therefore, the liberal response to conflict tends to be *managerial*. This is particularly seen in the emphasis on conflict management or conflict resolution.

At its best, the liberal youth ministry paradigm challenges us to address the personal and emotional needs of youth. At its worst, it tends to over-emphasize the humanity of Jesus at the expense of the divinity of Christ, who is Son of God. Also, middle-class urban youth ministries may not fully appreciate the suffering realities of their urban sisters and brothers in the inner city.

The liberal youth ministry is analogous to the Sadducees. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of angels. They were the sophisticates, highly educated and, generally speaking, the most rational. They were strongly opposed, on the one hand, by the Pharisees, for not being faithful to Jewish teachings and, on the other hand, by the Zealots, for being overly accommodating to Greek culture.

Like the Sadducees, the liberal youth ministry is committed to personal growth, intellectual development and emotional well-being. The liberal youth ministry tends to view Christianity more as a philosophy of life, rather than a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Youth who participate in the liberal youth ministry may be taught the Scriptures respectfully, but largely metaphorically, with less emphasis on their divinely authoritative significance. Also, the Christian faith tends to be presented as principles for ethical living, instead of biblical guidelines for living a holy and righteous life pleasing unto God.

3. The Activist Youth Ministry Paradigm

The activist youth ministry paradigm is the third type found in many inner city urban churches. The emphasis of this paradigm is on *urban ministry* for youth. That is, its primary purpose is developing an urban ministry centered program for youth. The paradigm begins by identifying *urban issues* affecting youth and then develops appropriate youth ministry programs which address these issues or needs.

Because of the activist youth ministry's contextual concerns, its evaluative question is *How are the issues which impact urban youth effectively being responded to?* This question is sociological and anthropological in nature. It focuses on the needs experienced *by* youth.

The primary concern for the activist youth ministry is the social needs of urban youth. Therefore,

in order to meet these many needs, the activist youth ministry tends to offer after school programs, economic empowerment programs, job training and social justice initiatives. Activist youth ministry retreats are offered to help urban youth develop trust in each other and work better together as a group to more intentionally develop social interaction abilities and reduce at-risk behavior.

The guiding principle for the activist youth ministry is *justice*. What are the injustices suffered by urban youth? How can justice be actualized for urban youth?

The activist youth ministry is based on an ideology of *revolution*. Therefore, the activist paradigm believes that youth ministry, as an institution, should be deconstructed and reconstructed. For the activist, the traditional paradigm is out of touch and irrelevant and the liberal paradigm is weak and insufficient.

How does the activist youth ministry respond to conflict? It expects conflict by confronting social issues and even creates conflict if it may lead to social change. Therefore, the activist response to conflict tends to be *negotiational* not unlike a union representative negotiating on behalf of his/her membership. It may also be *confrontational*, if this confrontation may lead to revolutionary change.

At its best, the activist youth ministry challenges us be engaged in addressing systemic injustice and social sin. At its worst, it seems overly concerned with deconstructing traditions, fighting systems and overturning institutions rather than growing in Christ.

The activist youth ministry is best exemplified by the Zealots. The Zealots were a radical Jewish group who were engaged in, or at least supported, the overthrow of the Roman government which occupied the Jewish land. They also abhorred the influence of Greek culture within Jewish life. This group, perhaps more than any other Jewish sect, awaited a revolutionary Messiah who would free the Jews from their spiritual and social bondage.

The activist youth ministry surely promotes a revolutionary Jesus and nurtures—to a greater or lesser degree—revolutionary youth engaged in social change. The danger of an extremist brand of activist youth ministry is the development of a ministry rooted more in anger against structures and systems instead of the compassion of Jesus Christ. Acts of justice may be manifested more in social revolution rather than biblical transformation.

In theory, social change sounds good, but to what end? Not all social change is necessarily in keeping with the Bible's understanding of justice. Youth may become martyrs for the wrong cause. While involvement in social change is certainly an essential component to the Christian life, it must be it centered on Christ and faithful to God's Word.

4. The Prophetic Youth Ministry Paradigm

Prophetic youth ministry is the most effective and holistic paradigm for ministering to urban youth. It is also the youth ministry paradigm least in operation in the urban context. The emphasis of this ministry is *Christian ministry* for urban youth. That is, its primary purpose is developing a *Christ-centered ministry* for urban youth. The assumptions of this paradigm begin with Christ and then develop a ministry for youth.

This starting point is significant. The traditional youth ministry focuses on youth ministry programs. The liberal youth ministry focuses on the personal felt-needs of youth. The activist youth ministry focuses on the social concerns impacting urban youth. While all of these issues are important, the prophetic youth ministry does not begin with these. The heart of the prophetic youth ministry is centered on Christ and then reaches out to address all three of these needs.

Because of the prophetic youth ministry's Christ-centered perspective (instead of program-centered, felt-needs centered or urban issues centered), its evaluative question is, *How is Christ growing, deepening and manifesting himself in the lives of urban youth?* This evaluative question shifts entirely the programmatic development of the youth ministry by focusing on Christ first and then considering programmatic questions second. The question allows for a more holistic and integrative approach—theoretically and programmatically. It focuses on Christ *in* youth.

Because of the holistic and integrative nature of the prophetic youth ministry, its concern for urban youth, too, is holistic and integrative. This paradigm seeks to address the spiritual, personal and social needs of urban youth. For the prophetic youth worker, to address only one of the three aspects over and above the others is nonsensical.

What critique does the prophetic youth worker offer regarding the traditional, liberal and activist

youth ministries? (See Table 1 at the end of the article for a comparison of the four paradigms.) First, a traditional youth ministry may address the spiritual needs of urban youth, but does it help them deal with their personal and emotional needs? And, does it speak out on behalf of social justice? A youth ministry certainly needs to share the Gospel message with teenagers and help them to grow in Christ (meeting spiritual needs). But, in many urban communities where schools are sub par, gang membership is growing, recreational sexual behavior is the norm, and homes may be in disarray, youth ministries need to provide academic help, personal encouragement and emotional support (meeting personal needs). Youth ministries also need to intentionally interact and respond to the realities of poverty, discrimination, police brutality, etc (meeting social needs). Frankly, any youth ministry not engaged in helping to meet the personal and social needs of youth in their community will not be taken seriously by the neighborhood youth.

Many traditional youth ministries are now reaching out to youth in more non-traditional ways. They hold hip-hop concerts, minister in the neighborhood, sponsor sports tournaments, etc. While these approaches are certainly very important and may be evangelistically effective, they do not make a youth ministry prophetic. For a traditional youth ministry to become more prophetic it must also be engaged in the personal and social transformation of urban youth—whether or not they accept Christ. The prophetic paradigm affirms the traditional paradigm's commitment to the Gospel message, but challenges the traditional paradigm to become more engaged in meeting the personal and social needs of all urban youth.

Second, a liberal youth ministry may address the personal needs of urban youth, but does it help nurture a deepening and growing relationship with Jesus Christ? And, does it speak out on behalf of social injustice? Many liberal youth ministries, particularly liberal youth ministries in the inner city, tend to be engaged in meeting the personal and social needs of their youth. However, they also tend to soften the radical social message of Christ, as well as the Gospel message that the assurance of salvation comes through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The prophetic paradigm affirms the liberal paradigm's commitment to the personal and charitable concerns of youth, but challenges the liberal paradigm to be more faithful to the traditional

and orthodox Gospel message, as well as become more radically engaged in social justice.

Finally, an activist youth ministry may address the social needs of urban youth, but does it help nurture a deepening and growing relationship with Jesus Christ? And, does it help deal with the many personal and emotional needs of youth? The prophetic paradigm certainly feels camaraderie with the activist paradigm's social commitment, but it challenges the activist paradigm to be more faithful to the traditional and orthodox understanding of the Gospel. Certain activist youth ministries have championed causes outside the traditional understanding of biblical orthodoxy. Some activist youth leaders have even embraced behaviors, actions and worldviews that are in direct contradiction to an orthodox understanding of the Holy Bible. This is a departure from the message of the biblical prophets. On these matters, the prophets part ways with the Zealots.

A prophetic youth ministry is committed to address all three domains: spiritual, personal and social. Therefore, programmatically, it offers activities and initiatives that address all three domains, integrating many of the above programs listed in the three previous paradigms. A job training initiative, GED preparation, tutoring service, group processing or mentoring programming is added to a Bible study, worship service or youth rally. Prophetic youth ministry retreats are developed to help youth better understand their relationship with themselves, with Christ, and with others.

The guiding principle for the prophetic youth ministry is *transformation*. How can youth be transformed holistically—spiritually, personally and socially?

The word *trans* means to go beyond, through, and on through to the other side. The word *form* comes from the Latin, *forma*, "beauty." Transformation, therefore, implies a reforming and reshaping of people towards the beautiful. A primary goal of the prophetic youth ministry is to remove the veil covering the soul of urban youth and show them how beautiful they really are. The call to transformation is to confront and transform the ugliness within ourselves (personal), within our hearts (spiritual), and within our society (social).

The prophetic youth ministry is based on an ideology of liberation. Therefore, youth ministries, as an institution, should be transformed. The traditional perspective believes no significant changes are necessary in youth ministries. The liberal perspective believes some changes are necessary in youth

ministries. The activist perspective believes in a complete overhaul of youth ministries. The prophetic perspective believes in a paradigmatic transformation, a fundamental change of purpose, guiding principle, assumptions and evaluative questions. Liberation, unlike revolution, is not a rejection of the institution of youth ministry. Rather, liberation, as understood by this paradigm, is rooted in the tri-fold prophetic tension between honoring the apostolic tradition and casting an eschatological and existential vision, while standing in solidarity with urban youth, especially the poor and marginalized.

How does the prophetic youth ministry tend to respond to conflict? It believes conflict may be creative and even welcomes constructive dissonance. Therefore, the prophetic response to conflict tends to intentionally *name and engage conflict* towards transformation.

In "Voices from the Fringes: A Case for Prophetic Youth Ministry," Calenthia S. Dowdy affirms that the prophetic paradigm is needed. She writes,

> Current youth ministry must release and empower its young prophets, encouraging them to speak and act regarding both moral and social righteousness. . . . It would not be wise to discourage them from learning about and speaking about structural evil that systematically represses certain segments of society. . . . This is not a call to a "social gospel," rather it is a call to the *whole gospel.* All of Christ's message must be preached. (Dowdy, 95)

The prophetic youth ministry paradigm is best exemplified by the prophets. The prophets were an unusual bunch. They were often misunderstood and disliked. They exhorted people to turn away from their sins and prepare for a day of judgment (spiritual repentance) and to change one's way of living (personal repentance). They challenged both spiritual and political leadership to initiate social justice (social repentance). Prophetic youth ministry is ministry on the margins, in the periphery. Prophetic youth workers are *peripheral prophets.* Dowdy distinguishes between what Robert Wilson identifies as *central prophets* and *peripheral prophets.* She writes,

> *Central prophets* are those who belong to the social center of the empire and customarily enjoy social prestige and political power. They tend to be concerned with the preservation of the status quo and are controlled by their governing

constituencies. And then there are *peripheral prophets,* those who belong to the fringes of society. They lack social prestige and power and derive their authority either from God and/or some marginal group to which they may belong. These prophets fight for social change and quality of life issues for marginalized groups. They believe that all people, regardless of their station in life, deserve justice and wholeness. They speak bold proclamation to the ruling powers, denouncing structured violence and economic and social injustices (Dowdy, 89).

Like the prophets, the prophetic youth ministry envisions and develops a ministry which addresses the spiritual, personal and social needs of youth. A prophetic youth ministry endeavors to assist youth to grow in Christ, develop into ethical persons , and become engaged in social action.

The prophetic youth ministry is built upon three interlocking philosophical and theological components: 1) a traditional understanding of the Holy Bible and Christian orthodoxy, 2) the spiritual, personal and emotional development of youth, and 3) social justice.

Three Interlocking Commitments of Prophetic Youth Ministry

Commitment to the traditional understanding of the Holy Bible and Christian Orthodoxy

Commitment to social justice

Commitment to the spiritual, personal, and emotional development of youth

Defining Prophetic Youth Ministry in the Urban Context

A prophetic youth ministry is a Christ-centered ministry fundamentally committed to and intentionally engaged in the spiritual, personal and social liberation and transformation of urban youth and their communities.

A prophetic youth ministry is Christ-centered. A prophetic youth ministry is centered first and always on Christ. While all youth ministries claim to be "Christ-centered," the emphasis here is to distinguish itself from being programs-centered, felt-needs centered, or even youth-centered. A program may not necessarily need to be Christ-centered in order to be helpful or resourceful. However, if it is not Christ-centered, then it is rooted in something else and, ultimately, can neither not be holistically transformative, nor be biblically prophetic.

A prophetic youth ministry is fundamentally holistic. A prophetic youth ministry is philosophically and constitutively committed to address the spiritual, personal and social needs of urban youth. A youth ministry which does not fundamentally root itself in all three of these components is not holistic.

A prophetic youth ministry is programmatically holistic. A prophetic youth ministry purposely and intentionally programs the youth ministry to meet the spiritual, personal and social needs of urban youth. A youth ministry which does not programmatically address all three of these components is not holistic.

A prophetic youth ministry engages its community. A prophetic youth ministry is committed to the transformation of its community, as well as the teens that enter the church. It does not isolate itself from the community. It is incarnationally involved in the spiritual, personal and social transformation of the community's youth.

A prophetic youth ministry is liberational. A prophetic youth ministry believes that Jesus Christ liberates urban youth, and all people, from personal and spiritual bondage, as well as social and systemic sin. It does not evangelize alone, without social action. And, it does not address social action alone, without evangelism.

A prophetic youth ministry promotes eschatological hope: A prophetic ministry recognizes that not all of the promises will be fulfilled in this life, but that it is demonstrating and pointing to the kingdom of God which will only be fully realized in the future. This eschatological hope is one thing that distinguishes the prophetic from both the liberal and activist paradigms. A prophetic ministry succeeds when the prophetic message has been spoken and enacted, not just when it sees "results" in terms of actual liberation or change of social conditions. Yet this prophetic hope must be held without giving in to defeatism or inactivity.

A prophetic youth ministry is transformational. A prophetic youth ministry believes transformation is a process towards the fulfillment of the reign of God, in and through the lives of urban youth. The prophetic youth ministry begins with liberation and proceeds with transformation, a lifelong spiritual, personal and social process.

Toward a Prophetic Youth Ministry

How does a youth ministry move towards becoming a more prophetic youth ministry? Fundamentally, there needs to be a paradigmatic shift both in worldview and structure. There is no simple way of transitioning into a prophetic youth ministry. Nevertheless, in order for this to occur, this writer suggests three movements. First, the youth ministry team must agree on the three interlocking commitments stated above. Second, identify the spiritual, personal and social needs of the youth in your target community or with your target group. Finally, intentionally program activities meeting the needs of these three areas. This simple model centered on Christ, guided by the power of the Holy Spirit, and rooted in the principle of *transformation,* hopefully, will be a step towards developing more prophetic youth ministries.

Steps in Transformation toward a Prophetic Youth Ministry

Third, develop a ministry which intentionally meets spiritual, personal, and social needs of youth.

First, agree on three interlocking commitments of the prophetic youth ministry.

Second, identify the spiritual, personal, and social needs of youth in your target community.

The Prophetic Urban Christian Youth Archetype

At the beginning of the article, I identified three urban Christian youth archetypes. Each one, generally speaking, is associated with a particular youth ministry paradigm. The traditional youth ministry tends to foster dogmatic Christian youth. The liberal youth ministry tends to nurture intellectual Christian youth. The activist youth ministry tends to produce socially engaged Christian youth.

The fourth archetype is the prophetic urban Christian youth archetype. Prophetic Christian youth view Jesus as the liberator of spiritual, personal and social sin, and oppression. First, prophetic Christian youth have a traditional understanding of the Holy Bible and Christian orthodoxy. They desire to grow and deepen their relationship with Jesus Christ. Second, they have a holistic understanding of the human person. They desire a healthy integration and development in the spiritual, personal, and social realms of their lives. Finally, they believe in and passionately committed to social justice.

Nicole is a youth worker at a theologically prophetic church. She is committed to holistic transformation of youth and their communities,

fostering a balance of Christ-centered spiritual formation, personal development, and a social-justice ethic. Hence, her lessons and programs address all three of these areas. She sees herself as mentor and guide for the youth. For Nicole, the primary goal of youth ministry is to nurture holistic youth who are growing in the Lord, in potential, and in service.

Each paradigm offers a unique contribution to the field of youth ministry. (See Table 2 for comparisons.) I believe the prophetic youth ministry paradigm is the most effective and contextually relevant paradigm toward the trans-formation of urban youth and their communities. It is faithful to the Christian faith, encourages a holistic worldview, and challenges youth ministries to be engaged in community development —meeting the spiritual, personal, and social needs of youth. It honors Christ and urban communities.

Works Cited

Dowdy, Calentia S. "Voices from the Fringes: A Case for Prophetic Youth Ministry. *The Journal of Youth Ministry* 3 no. 2 (2005).

Holland, Joe and Peter Henriot. *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis/Center of Concern, 1983.

Table 1. Four Paradigms of Youth Ministry in the Urban Context

	Ministry Emphasis	Purpose	Assumptions	Evaluative Question	Primary Concern	Program	Guiding Principle	Ideology	Change in Youth Ministry	Approach to Conflict
Traditional Youth Ministry **Biblical Example: Pharisees**	Youth Ministry in the urban context	Ministry-centered programs for urban youth	Begins with youth ministry programs	How effective is the urban youth ministry program? The ministerial question focuses on the program *for* youth.	Spiritual needs of youth	Bible study, worship, service, evangelism, fellowship, Sunday school	Disciple-ship	Biology	No change	Attempts to avoid and/or silence conflict
Liberal Youth Ministry **Biblical Example: Sadducees**	Ministry for urban youth	Felt-needs-centered programs for urban youth	Begins with felt needs of youth	How are the needs of urban youth effectively being met? The psych-ological question focuses on the needs *of* youth.	Personal needs of urban youth	Support groups, counseling, mentoring, choir, trips, family services, music and art	Growth	Evolution	Reform	Under-stands conflict as part of the evolutionary process
Activist Youth Ministry **Biblical Example: Zealots**	Urban ministry for youth	Urban ministry-centered programs for youth	Begins with urban issues affecting youth	How are the issues which affect urban youth being responded to? The sociological/ anthropolog-ical question focuses on the issues experienced by youth.	Social needs of urban youth	Social action, ethnic celebration, food pantry, economic empower-ment, job training, after-school tutoring	Justice	Revolution	Decon-struct and recon-struct	Expects conflict by confronting social issues and even creates conflict if it may lead to change
Prophetic Youth Ministry **Biblical Example: Prophets**	Christian ministry for urban youth	Christ-centered programs for urban youth	Begins with Christ	How is Christ deepening, growing, and manifesting in the lives of urban youth? The holistic question focuses on Christ in youth.	Spiritual needs of urban youth	Integrated spiritual, personal, and social counseling programs	Trans-formation	Liberation	Trans-form	Believes conflict may be creative and even welcomes constructive dissonance

Table 2. Four Urban Christian Youth Archetypes

	Youth Ministry Paradigm	Theological Persuasion	Role of Youth Worker	Under-standing of Jesus	Understanding of Scripture	Understanding of Self	Understanding of Society
Dogmatic Christian Youth	Traditional Youth Ministry	Conservative	Pastor	Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior.	Reads Scripture through a tradition-specific lens (Evangelical, Pentecostal, Charismatic, Orthodox, Catholic, etc.)	Dualistic: body/soul—flesh/spirit	Views culture as irredeemable; most counter-cultural. Society is at odds and incompatible with Christianity; one must affirm faith at the expense of culture.
Intellectual Christian Youth	Liberal Youth Ministry	Liberal	Friend	Jesus is a good person and a wise sage.	Reads the Scriptures metaphorically	Ethical: contributor to humanity, reason, potential	Overindulges culture; elevates society and complies with or accept culture's moral and ethical values.
Socially Engaged Christian Youth	Activist Youth Ministry	Social Gospel	Advocate	Jesus is a radical social activist.	Reads the Scriptures from a social-justice perspective	Radical: structural and systematic change agent	Tends to have a "negative" perspective of culture. It is suspicious of society, which is in need of revolutionary change; society is sick, but change is possible with active engagement.
Prophetic Christian Youth	Prophetic Youth Ministry	Prophetic	Mentor and Guide	Jesus as the liberator of spiritual, personal and social bondage and oppression.	Reads the Scriptures authoritatively and liberationally	Holistic: spiritual (heart), emotional (soul), physical (strength), intellectual (mind), social (neighbor), and moral (self) Luke 10:27	Tends to have a "positive" perspective of culture; views culture as redeemable. This youth ministry not only engages in projects and programs that impact communities and culture, but cultivates a transformational spirit and ethos along with evangelism. The liberating power of Jesus can transform any cultural construct.

[The "Understanding of Society" is greatly informed by H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Collins, 1951); Anthony Campolo and Donald Ratcliff, "Activist Youth Ministry," in Donald Ratcliff and James A. Davies, *Handbook of Youth Ministry* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1991); Merton Strommen, Karen E. Jones, and Dave Rahn, *Youth Ministry that Transforms* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).]
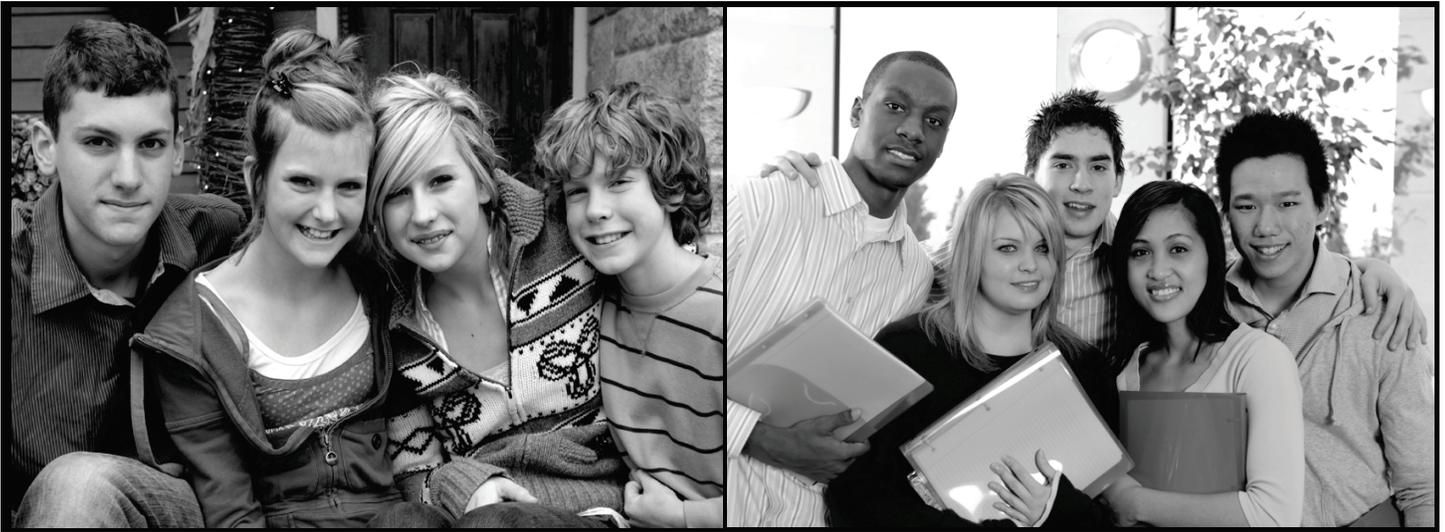
Every Church Can Build a Sustainable Youth Ministry

Mark DeVries

E ach year our Youth Ministry Architects team is privileged to work intimately with dozens of churches, partnering with them in building sustaining youth ministries. The more churches we have worked with, the more we have discovered patterns. By far the most startling is this: *Most American churches have, often without recognizing it, embraced a clear model for youth ministry, a model more popular than purpose-driven, family-based, or contemplative. Most churches have chosen to do youth ministry with a model best described as gambling.*

It usually looks like this: The leaders of the church cross their fingers and believe, with all their hearts, that *this time* the cards will fall in their favor. This time, they'll find the superstar youth director who will change everything. . . fast. This time, they'll find just the right curriculum, just the right convention that will, finally, make youth ministry *work* as it has never really worked before, at least not in a sustainable way. This time when they role the dice, if they wish hard enough, a thriving youth ministry will turn up.

But few people get rich gambling. For every one that does, there are thousands mired in chronic poverty. But wealth—and sustainable youth ministry—come not from gambling but predictably from a strategic, sacrificial, and annoyingly inconvenient investment of time and resources.

But there is good news: building a sustainable, thriving youth ministry is not only possible, it's actually predictable. Sadly, most churches don't have the patience to wait to build a sustainable youth ministry, so they opt for the roll of the dice. There is a better way.

Mark DeVries is the founder of Youth Ministry Architects, a hands-on coaching service for churches whose youth ministries are in (intentional or unexpected) transition or churches who hope to see their youth ministries move to the next level. For over 22 years, Mark has served as the Associate Pastor for Youth and their Families at First Presbyterian Church in Nashville, Tennessee, where he continues to oversee the youth ministry on a part-time basis. Mark is the author of *Sustainable Youth Ministry* (IVP, 2008) and *Family-Based Youth Ministry* (IVP, 2004). Website: www.ymarchitects.com.

(This article is reprinted from *Sustainable Youth Ministry*. Copyright 2008 by Mark DeVries. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press, P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515. www.ivpress.com.

A Systems Approach

Leaders are responsible for both the big structures that serve as cornerstones of confidence, and for the human touches that shape a positive emotional climate to inspire and motivate people.
Rosabeth Moss Kanter

Sustainable youth ministries are led by systems leaders. The day of the camp counselor youth minister who focuses only on students is over. Sustainable youth ministries make the leap from a short-term, patchwork ministry to one's based on established systems that last long after the current leadership team has moved on.

Every church can build a sustainable youth ministry by attending first to the two key foundational systems for youth ministry:

1) *Architecture*: the structures of sustainability, and
2) *Atmosphere*: the culture, climate and ethos that sustain the health of an organization

Content Thinking Versus Systems Thinking

As I have tried to get my head around the power of a systems approach to initiating strategic change, family systems theory has been immensely helpful, particularly in its distinction between "content issues" and "system issues."

A content issue involves a specific topic, usually a topic of conflict. In youth ministry, typical content issues can be anything from a problem with cliques to a problem with the seventh-grade curriculum.

System issues, on the other hand, are those processes that take place beneath, around, and within the particular topics of concern, things like *trust* among the leadership, *clarity* of expectations for staff and volunteers, or *ownership* of the ministry beyond the staff.

Trying to initiate change while staying solely focused on content issues is like sprinting up and own the aisle of a speeding jet, believing that the sheer force of effort will speed up the plane. Too many youth workers are wearing themselves out, completely unaware of the fact that they are a part of a system that is carrying them (and their ministries)

in a direction that may be completely independent of their exhausting labor.

Sadly, the hired youth staff person often becomes the content issue of choice when its time for launching criticism at a youth ministry. "Simple" solutions to a youth ministry's problems almost always start with a focus on the youth director: he needs to get more organized; she just needs to get out of the office and spend more time with kids; he just needs a little more training; or (the more permanent solution) she just needs to *go*.

But dramatic, sustainable change happens in youth ministries only when we take our focus off the "presenting issues"—the obvious concerns that seem to be creating so much anxiousness—and put our focus on the system patterns that keep us locked into unproductive ways of doing things.

The Proverbs 14:4 Challenge

As we embark on making the shift to a systems way of doing youth ministry. I invite you to take *The Proverbs 14:4 Challenge*. This obscure proverb has the power to reframe our understanding of the kind of hassle involved in building a sustainable ministry:

Where no oxen are, the manger is clean.
    But much revenue comes by the strength of the ox. (Proverbs 14:4, NASB)

I know—it's not exactly a passage that will start a revival. But these words offer a clear challenge to any church still looking for the "Easy Button." Let me put it in other words:

If you want a manger free of ox poop, don't buy an ox.
But if you want to multiply your harvest, an ox sure will come in handy.

The challenge of sustainable youth ministry is as straightforward as the proverb: Want to build a ministry that lasts, a ministry that deeply impacts young people, families, and the wider world? Then be prepared for the mess.

Stage 1. Building Right: The Structures of Sustainability

How do we move our youth ministries from where they are to where we want them to be? It all starts with the single word *structure*. Any land animal more than six inches long needs a structure, a skeleton, to survive. And any youth ministry with more than a handful of youth will need one as well. Unfortunately, most youth ministries (and youth ministers) are woefully short on structure.

Most churches frantically try to make it to the next level without building first-level structures. As a result, most churches build house-of-cards youth ministries, programs that expand willy-nilly to the point of implosion.

But sustainable youth ministries do it differently.

Squaring the Corners: Developing Control Documents

All four walls were up. Our one-room building in the slums of Tijuana was taking shape. Our work had progressed more rapidly that expected. Spirits were high—until our work came to a screeching halt.

Our construction guide asked for a few volunteers to "square the building." As our more agile workers positioned themselves on top of the corners, the rest of us waited for what felt like a very long time.

The grumbling of annoyed youth and leaders ("What's taking so long?" "Come on!") couldn't hurry our site supervisor. He knew what most of the rest of us didn't: taking time to square the house would save exponential amounts of time later.

Very few churches take the time to "square" their youth ministries. As a result, these ministries waste countless hours reinventing the wheel each year, compensating for the results of foundational corners that never got squared. In our work with churches, we look for five key documents to confirm that a youth ministry has been "squared."

1. Directories

Most churches have lists of their youth, volunteers, and visitors, but those listed are usually stored in a variety of arcane computer systems. A sustainable youth ministry has three standard starts directories:

1. Youth Directory: including name, school, grade, parents' names, phone number, and any other information that seems appropriate
2. Volunteers and Staff Directory: including each person's contact information and role in the ministry
3. Visitors Directory: including the names and contact information for all visitors to youth ministry in the previous two to three years.

There's no hard-and-fast rule for deciding which young people belong in the youth directory and which belong in the visitors directory. What's absolutely crucial, though, is that these directories be updated at least annually, using a consistent standard for who does and does not qualify as "ours." As a way of maximizing the accuracy of the directories, we recommend *printing* them annually and distributing them at least to the members of the youth leadership team.

2. An Annual Events Calendar

There's no reason for a youth ministry not to have its major-events calendar mapped out at least a year in advance, except laziness. Every September, parents should be able to plan around events, including trips, for the upcoming summer (nine months away). Too many youth ministers complain about the lack of committed volunteers and youth who don't sign up for programs, when those programs are announced less than six weeks before they happen. It's almost impossible to recruit volunteers to take load-bearing responsibility for programs less than six weeks away.

3. Job Descriptions

When I ask the youth ministers we coach for a copy of their job description, the typical answers are variations on these: "I know I've got one, but. . . [nervous laughter]." "I haven't looked at it in years."

Everyone from the lead youth staff to the van drivers have a better chance of playing their positions well if we can at least give them, in writing, a document that outlines the scope of their responsibilities. We like to help churches create results-oriented job descriptions, rather than responsibility-oriented ones, an approach that gives latitude to each worker to determine the "how" behind the desired results. (A few sample job descriptions can be found at www.ymarchitects.com.) Note, however, that a job description only gets used

to the extent that it is part of a larger process that includes an annual review and revision of it.

4. The Master Recruiting List

Most youth ministers struggle to find volunteers. But very few have a clear process for recruiting the volunteers they need, beyond blanket appeals to the overworked church members. A master recruiting list begins the process by first determining exactly how many volunteer leaders are needed for the coming year. We recommend creating this list in February (when recruiting season opens) and spending a few hours every week calling the most likely prospects, expecting a "no" from two-thirds of them.

Start thinking like a coach. No football coach would ever think of stepping onto the field with only five players. A youth director who runs ahead to start building programs before he or she has as team to run those programs will be perpetually mired in sputtering initiatives that never quite get off the ground. (A sample master recruiting template can be found at www.ymarchitects.com.)

5. The Curriculum Template

We call the final control document a curriculum template, a six- or seven-year game plan of how the teachings of youth ministry will be structured. There's an almost infinite variety of approaches to developing a curriculum template.

Most youth ministries have a reactive curriculum "plan," driven primarily by the availability (and marketing) of specific curriculum resources. A curriculum template, on the other hand, provides the framework for a wide variety of resources that might be used. Here are a few examples:

- One church might choose a curriculum template based on the Common Lectionary and match the teachings in the youth ministry to this three-year, crossdenominational plan that ensures exposure to the entire scope of the Bible in three years.
- Another church might buy into the scope and sequence of a denominational curriculum or an independently published resource.
- Another church might have an annual rotation, ensuring that each year, the youth of the church are exposed to core topics, like Jesus, Old Testament, New Testament,

relationships, missions and service, soul-tending, decision-making, and apologetics.
- And still another church might choose to let the flow of the Bible provide the template, beginning each year with Genesis and ending each year in Revelation.

Only after the template is determined should specific curriculum resources be chosen or developed. This approach allows for the certain reality that some curriculum resources won't work and will need to be replaced, *without* having to change the template or the overall plan.

Unlike the other control documents (which are straightforward assignments), the development of a clear curriculum template is a complex process that will likely require a much broader buy-in from stakeholders in the youth ministry.

Sample Curriculum Templates

Model #1. Bible-Centered Template
(Two 3-year rotations: grades 7-9 and 10-12)
➤ Year 1—Old Testament
➤ Year 2—New Testament (Non-Gospels)
➤ Year 3—Jesus (Gospels)

Model #2. The Buckets Template
(Broad topics repeated every year; 6-year rotation)
➤ The Buckets: Relationships, Old Testament, New Testament, Jesus, Missions/Service, Soul Tending, Decision Making/Life Skills
➤ Year One Example for grades 7–12: 1) Parents (relationships), 2) Prophets (Old Testament), 3) Romans (New Testament), 4) Parables (Jesus), 5) Justice (Missions/Service); 6) Prayer (Soul Tending); 7) Dating (Decision Making/Life Skills)
➤ Year Two Example: Same categories with different topics.

Model #3. Lectionary Template
(Based on the Common Lectionary, formatted in two, 3-year rotations)

Model #4. Broad Categories Template
(One 2-year rotation for grades 7-8, and one 4-year rotation for grades 9-12.)
➤ Grades 7- 8: The Bible-Centered Template (see Model #1)
➤ Grades 9– 12: The Buckets Template (see Model #2)

Model #5. Seasonal Template
(One 2-year rotation for grades 7-8, and one 4-year rotation for grades 9-12.)
- ➢ Grades 7– 8: Buckets topics interrupted by Bible–centered topics: 1) Advent—Old Testament, 2) Relationships, 3) Lent—Bible/Jesus, 4) Missions/Service, 5) Soul Tending, 6) Summer—New Testament
- ➢ Grades 9-12: 1) Advent—Relationships, 2) Old Testament, 3) Lent—Missions/Service, 4) Jesus, 5) Summer—Soul Tending, 6) New Testament

Model #6. Theological Themes
(One 6-year rotation)
- ➢ Year 1: Who is God?
- ➢ Year 2: Who is Jesus?
- ➢ Year 3: Who is the Holy Spirit?
- ➢ Year 4: What is Salvation?
- ➢ Year 5: What is the Church?
- ➢ Year 6: What is our Mission?

The corners are, of course, not the foundation. We build on the foundation of Christ, but before we start building, we've got to make sure we have squared our corners.

Purposeful Structure: Developing Visioning Documents

Once the control documents are in place, it's time to develop documents that can clarify and provide the roadmap for the future of youth ministry. If a visioning process is to set the course for a youth ministry's future, it will involve a broad range of stakeholders in the ministry, including teachers, youth leaders, elders, youth, and parents. But the process of drafting the four vision documents in a way that propels a ministry forward is no small feat.

By allowing multiple groups to work on drafting and revising the same documents, we avoid the trap of premature closure, the temptation to accept the first "good enough" idea that the most vocal group member proposes. Without an intentionally crafted process, the development of the visioning documents easily settles into what Patrick Lencioni calls, "an atmosphere of self-victimizing groupthink."

We use a sometimes tedious and time-consuming process that engages ten to twenty stakeholders (staff, parents, volunteers, and sometimes youth) over a period of twelve to fifteen hours to craft these four

key vision documents: 1) a mission statement, 2) measurable three-year goals, 3) a statement of values, and 4) an organizational chart.

1. The Youth Ministry Mission Statement

Driven by the urgent demands of simply keep a youth ministry afloat, most youth workers define long-range planning as "getting this month's calendar done just in time for the newsletter to go out."

But without a clearly articulated, compelling vision of what their church would like for its youth ministry to accomplish, these ministries meander with no higher purpose than simply "having a youth ministry" or "having a youth ministry better than most other churches in town." But this is not a vision; it is a fearful reaction to the risk of extinction.

A clearly articulated vision protects churches from becoming, in the words of Robert Lewis, "a sort of Christian 'club' that [exhausts] itself trying to keep its members happy." A compelling vision protects youth ministries from competing agendas and paralyzing practices. And a well-crafted mission statement can become the filter through which leaders of a ministry determine which of the hundreds of ideas before them they will actually implement. (For a sample mission statement go to: www.ymarchitects.com.)

2. Measurable Three-Year Goals

Most youth ministers I know are happy not to measure anything. Many bristle at the thought of tracking attendance patterns or setting measurable goals. But without agreed upon, measurable goals, a youth ministry will suffer from terminal vagueness. A numbers-free youth ministry simple doesn't work for the long haul.

Youth workers can be victims of numbers or authors of them. What would happen, I wonder, if youth workers stopped fighting *against* numbers and started taking responsibility for determining what measurements will best help them track the results they want to achieve?

Without clear and measurable goals, the youth ministry is evaluated by as many standards as there are complainers. Without clear and measurable goals, the only marching order for a youth director is "try to keep as many people happy as possible." Clear, measurable targets can protect youth workers from the pressure to say yes to every new idea that bubbles up from important people in the church.

As important as the first visioning process is, it's equally important for the youth ministry to have processes in place for evaluating and re-visioning its goals *each and every year*. The youth ministries we work with establish three-year goals, each accompanied by a one-year benchmark. The three-year goals tend to be "stretch goals," often set as high as the ministry hopes to reach, knowing that normal organizations tend to hit 50 percent of their goals. The one-year benchmarks are more attainable, since these are standards against which the effectiveness of the ministry will be measured annually.

Goals do not necessarily mean that bigger is better. They affirm that *clearer is better*. Goals help define what a particular ministry will look like as it moves toward increasing health. If we want our youth ministries to be evaluated by something *other* than numbers and programs, we must take responsibility to define our targets clearly.

3. A Statement of Values

Values stand guard over the climate of a youth ministry. The climate or culture of a ministry must never be sacrificed on the altar of achieving measurable goals. Values protect a youth ministry from becoming so goal-oriented that it sacrifices the things that matter most.

Values define the spirit with which we will go about accomplishing our goals. For instance, love, kindness, and respect are values.

One church, which had run offer four youth ministers in as many years, named one of their values as "excellence." As we processed together how this value, if left unchecked, could result in a destructive, overactive-white-blood-cell pattern, they chose to add the value of *grace*. Without being intentional about its values, a youth ministry has little power to cultivate a climate of transformation. (For samples of value statements go to: www.ymarchitects.com.)

4. A Structure

Ambitious churches often design grand schemes for success that simply outrun their available resources. I've spoken with more than a few senior pastors who express hope for a youth ministry that will engage four hundred to five hundred youth a week. But few seem to have any idea of how many resources it will take to sustain such a ministry. And so the church hires a youth staff woefully inadequate for

accomplishing the church's ambitious vision—a recipe for nonsustainability.

Getting a handle on the resources a strategic plan will require demands a clear definition of the organization's structure. Michael Gerber notes,

> Without an Organization Chart, everything hinges on luck and good feelings, on the personalities of the people and the goodwill they share. Unfortunately, personalities, good feelings, goodwill, and luck aren't the only ingredients of a successful organization; alone, they are the recipe for chaos and disaster.

In almost every vision retreat I've done, someone resists the idea of a traditional organization chart, and recommends instead something more organic, maybe a three-dimensional matrix chart or one with less layers, more like a series of concentric circles than a hierarchy. My experience has been that, though I appreciate the creativity and out-of-the-box thinking that these folks bring to the table, attempts at creativity with an organizational chart typically result in fuzzy definitions of who is responsible for what, the very opposite of the purpose of such a chart. (For samples of youth ministry organizational charts go to www.ymarchitects.com.)

Building Right – Reflection Questions

1. Which of the control documents does your ministry have in place?
2. Which of the vision documents does your ministry have in place?
3. What prevents your ministry from "squaring the corners" and getting the key structures outlined in this section in place?
4. If you had to guess, what is the target number of youth the leaders of your church would like to see involved on an average week?

Stage 2. Changing Culture: The Work of the Environmental Architect

Nothing good happens by accident.
Peter Drucker

Almost every longing related to youth ministry is connected to a single desire: We want to *change something*.

Sometimes that desire is simple and straightforward: "I want to get my youth committee out from under the children's committee on the organizational chart." Others are more far-reaching and global: "I want to move my youth from apathy toward becoming more fully devoted followers of Christ." And still others are plainly pragmatic: "How can we get more kids involved?" or "How can I recruit more leaders?"

But beneath them all is the same fundamental passion: the drive to create change.

Those who learn to be change agents impact almost everything they touch. And those who never learn this skill stay trapped on a treadmill nowhere.

Youth ministry *does*, in fact, "work," and it does so with almost predictable regularity. In a wide variety of contexts, across a wide variety of denominations, there *are* youth ministries that have learned to catalyze change, not only in young people's lives, but in their churches as well. More often than not, when we find those youth ministries, we also discover that a particular kind of culture has been established, a culture in which leaders don't simply *push* for change, they *cultivate* it.

In the first part of this article we looked at the *core* structures that initiate and sustain strategic change—the *architecture* of transformation. But beyond and beneath the work of the architect (with the blueprints, the steps, the strategies and structures), there are deeper, more fundamental process that impact change. Though sociologists refer to this social atmosphere at the ethos or culture of a group, I use the term *climate,* because terms like "ice cold" or "warmed up" or "stormy" give us not just the meaning of the terms but their *feel* as well.

Climate Control

Most new youth workers step into their roles with the luxury of inexperience, armed with little more than raw enthusiasm to love kids and lead them to Jesus. Certainly not a bad start. They may know how to find activities and programs and curriculums and websites; they might even know how to do contact work and network with other youth workers. But they all must, if that are to navigate the turbulent waters of ministry, do something much more foundational.

I like to call it **environmental architecture** (a term borrowed from Erwin McManus). An environmental architect begins with the confession that we have no power to *make* young people grow. We cannot make our churches or youth ministries or senior pastors into what we want them to be. We cannot make parents, volunteers, and youth do what we want them to do. What we can do is create an environment in which this kind of growth and change is not only possible, but probable.

Think greenhouse. A greenhouse is a place where living things grow well, a place protected from the unpredictability of the elements, where fragile plants are able to grow strong regardless of the conditions outside. Fragile plants thrive when the climate is controlled.

In the same way, the environmental architect focuses on creating climate in his or her youth ministry, spending very little time worrying about the climate outside, those things that can't be controlled, like busy kids, complaining parents, demanding senior pastors.

Periodically I get calls from people who ask if they can come to observe our youth ministry. I warn them to prepare to be underwhelmed. By the time they leave, I can see it on their faces. They don't say it, but I know what they're thinking: "We could do *that*! Why is it working here but not for us back home, when our programs are actually *better* than these.

As much as I might hate to admit it, they're usually right. It's not that we try to have mediocre programs; it's just that they seem to happen with disappointing regularity. Yet the ministry continues to thrive. We continue to see surprising transformation in young people's lives. After two decades of doing ministry in the same setting, I've begun to discover why.

Transformation doesn't happen primarily because specific tasks get accomplished or because of the consistently excellent programs. *Transformation becomes habitual for a youth ministry when a unique climate of transformation is established.* I'm afraid I had to learn that lesson the hard way.

Climate, Vision, Tasks

Ask any youth director what his or her job is and chances are you'll hear a list of tasks: "I hang out with kids," "I teach the Bible," "I go to meetings." Sadly, most youth workers are almost obsessively focused on tasks. They react to the demands placed before them, daily racing against the clock to try to get more done in less time, to get all the phone calls and emails answered, all the lessons written, the programs prepared. But eventually, almost every youth worker, no matter how organized, realizes that there is simply not enough time to get all the tasks completed.

The completion of a fragmented set of tasks, as much diligence as that process might require, can be the very thing that prevents youth workers from building momentum for their ministries. When this realization comes, it's not unusual for a youth worker (or a church) to send out the call for a "vision."

And the scurry of meetings begins. We've seen churches spend hundreds of volunteer and staff hours to hammer out a vision for the youth ministry, write mission statements and value statements, and prepare measurable goals. The best of these create structures that keep the visioning documents consistently before those responsible for building the ministry. But sadly, vision, in itself, is not enough.

Too often, even the most compelling vision is thwarted because, in spite of all the right structures being in place, little to no attention has been given to the climate. Like working in a building that's structurally sound but filled with noxious gases, these youth ministries may have a fine, well-structured vision. But the climate is toxic, preventing sustainable change from every taking hold.

A Primer on Environmental Architecture

If we are to be environmental architects who work to create the right climate for our youth ministries, where do we begin? We've discovered the five decisions that most profoundly affect the building of a healthy climate: 1) delivering results, 2) trusting the

process, 3) importing joy into the chaos, 4) embracing stories and metaphors, and 5) instilling rituals and traditions.

1. We Deliver Results.

By far the most dramatic way to change the climate of a youth ministry is to provide its stakeholders with the visible evidence that something good actually is happening. Nothing accelerates climate change quite like speeding up results.

To illustrate, I don't have to look any farther than across town at the University of Vanderbilt Commodore football program. A few years ago, the team was in the middle of its predictable losing season. No one expected much more than one or two games where Vandy would spoil the hopes of some SEC football powerhouse. Few even held out hope for a winning season. But all that changed the day after a visit to Neyland Stadium in Knoxville, a game in which the Commodores broke their twenty-plus-year losing streak to the University of Tennessee. If you happened to be in Nashville the week after that game, you would have thought our 'Dores had just won the Super Bowl. One key win *dramatically* shifted the climate.

To begin tilting the climate of a youth ministry in a positive direction, its leaders need to identify a small victory, a single visible result, and go after it. The climate of a youth ministry can change with something as simple as recruiting a new team of volunteers (and commissioning them in front of the church). Another church tipped its youth ministry toward a healthy climate with a single mission trip that attracted just a handful more students than the year before.

2. We Trust the Process.

Moving from where we are to where we want to be takes time—so much time, in fact, that many youth directors short-circuit the process. If we're going to engineer a climate of transformation for our youth ministries, we will not do it by stepping in with guns blazing.

Sustainable change happens when leaders recognize the power of incremental revolution, the power of one small change after another, until the incremental changes result in exponential change. Too many churches and youth ministers distrust the process and find themselves changing focus every few years, gambling their hopes on the next superstar on

the court. As a result, they never experience the profound momentum that builds when a team moves together in the same direction for years.

3. We Import Joy in the Chaos.

In his book, *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman tells of a study that revealed the power of a joyful climate in maximizing people's ability to solve problems. In this study, two groups were given the very same problem and asked to solve it. The only difference between the groups was that the first watched a video of funny television bloopers before trying to solve the puzzle. The second group went straight to work. The laughing groups were consistently better at solving the puzzles (another word for "problems") than the folks who went straight to work.

Family-systems experts suggest that the only way to impact a stuck system is to maintain a nonanxious presence in it, to do more than just react. Many youth workers find themselves in a highly reactive posture, blaming their senior pastors or critical parents for "making them mad." But youth workers who successfully initiate change in their churches have learned to maintain a playful detachment from those triggers that cause people to spiral into negativity and reactive blaming.

4. We Instill Stories and Metaphors.

The Hopi proverb is right: "The one who tells the stories rules the world." Diana Butler Bass writes, "The primary skill for leaders is the ability to clarify and reconceptualize stories, essentially to be one of the best storytellers around the campfire." If we want to create a climate of transformation, we'll do so by creating an "intentional mythology" for our ministries

Consider the positive mythology created around a building project. There's the thrill of visiting the site, seeing the progress from week to week, walking people through the skeleton frame, imagining what each room will be used for. Though there's a mess everywhere, though the space is totally unusable, excitement still grows because *the mess is seen as part of the process*.

Every youth ministry is either buoyed up or dragged down by its mythology, by the stories and metaphors used to describe it. For most youth ministries, this mythology is almost entirely accidental. But for those of us who lead, we have the

power (and responsibility) to craft the stories that will define the climate of our ministries.

Leaders of thriving youth ministries are harbingers of what God is doing and is about to do. They're the bards of their youth ministries, telling youth and leaders the tales of who they are and what God is up to. They're the environmental experts, cultivating the ethos by seeding it with stories and metaphors that affirm that, although the picture is not yet completed, signs of progress are popping up all around.

5. We Embrace Ritual and Traditions, Signs and Symbols.

Allentown Presbyterian Church is a strange place. With about five hundred people in worship on an average Sunday, this small-town church in New Jersey often has more than two hundred youth each week attending its youth groups. Led mostly by parents who never got the memo that kids didn't want them around, this extraordinary ministry has the kind of climate most youth ministries long for.

The first time I visited, I was struck by the power of its rituals and traditions, little things like lighted candles on the tables (even in the presence of junior-high boys) and the way the tables were magically taken down by kids after dinner. But one tradition gave me (and anyone who walked through the door) a powerful picture of who this group is: every person who entered the room was greeted in the same way—with cheers and applause. Is it any wonder the biggest problem facing this ministry is what to do with all the kids who keep coming?

Each year on the first weekend of May, our youth ministry sponsors an event we affectionately call Crud Day. To the outside observer, it's nothing more than a typical messy youth group event. But for us, it's one of the most important rites of passage. You see, Crud Day takes place on the afternoon of Confirmation Sunday, when the sixth-graders who've just completed the confirmation process make their profession of faith before the entire church. As these youth move from childhood into the youth group, we mark their transition by putting them on teams with youth from all the other grades. The mud, shaving cream, and water balloons give a clear message, "You are one of us. You belong."

Closely related to rituals and traditions are signs and symbols. Signs and symbols have a way of locking in a group's rituals and traditions. Some groups create a logo; others invite you to paint their names, their

handprints, or their favorite Scriptures on the wall of the youth room; still other churches collect pictures for years and present a photo album of memories to students when they graduate.

When we dropped our youngest daughter off at college this year, I couldn't help but notice the signs and symbols she placed around her room—posters of music groups, pictures of friends, *and* the silver communion cup she was given at our church's senior banquet as a reminder not only of her identity in Christ but also of her connection to her church family.

Rituals and traditions, signs and symbols help establish a climate in which community identity can be cultivated.

Changing Culture– Reflection Questions

1. If you were to give a weather report of the climate of your current youth ministry, what would that report be?
2. What stories or metaphors define the culture of your youth ministry?
    a) a story of a time when "God showed up" in your youth ministry
    b) a story of unexpected grace in your youth ministry
    c) a story of a young persons' unlikely connection to your church

---

Taking the Long View

In *Where The Heart Waits*, Sue Monk Kidd's words about the transformation of the heart are equally true about the transformation of an organization: ". . . new life comes slowly, awkwardly, on wobbly wings" (Monk, 177). I have watched it happen in our own ministry where I have been a poster child for Winston Churchill's curious definition of success: "One failure after another. . . with enthusiasm!"

Whether you are starting from scratch, renovating an established youth ministry, or hoping to breathe new life into a place that has been stuck for years, remember as you begin, that "everything can look like a failure in the middle." And whether you are a "lifer" who plans to work with teenagers until your dying breath or someone who plans to provide support from a distance, I invite you to join in the chorus calling the church back to investing in equipping a generation of young disciples who can transform their homes, their schools, their churches, their workplaces, and their worlds for Christ.

Youth Ministry & Adolescent Faith Formation

Recent Publications
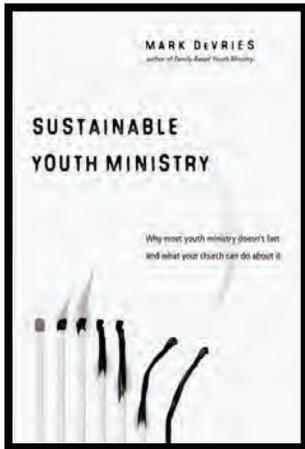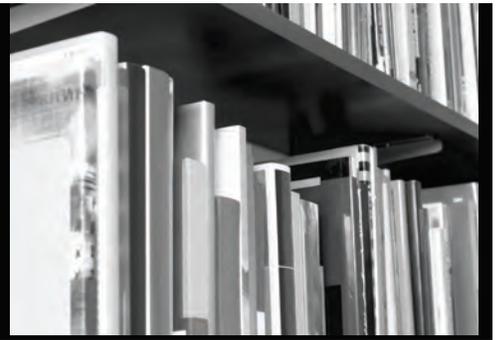
Sustainable Youth Ministry
Mark DeVries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008) [$16]

Mark DeVries pinpoints the problems that cause division and burnout in youth pastors and youth ministers. He provides the practical tools and strategies needed to lay a strong foundation for a church's youth ministry, one that isn't built solely on a person or a program. The book explores: 1) understanding why most churches stay chronically stuck in very predictable (and solvable) problems in their youth ministries, 2) moving toward a systemic approach to youth ministry by tending first to the climate and structures undergirding the ministry, 3) helping senior pastors and search committees avoid the common pitfalls made in hiring youth staff, 4) equipping youth pastors to build strong volunteer teams and navigate the turbulent waters of church politics, and 5) giving youth pastors creative tools for lasting in youth ministry for the long haul.
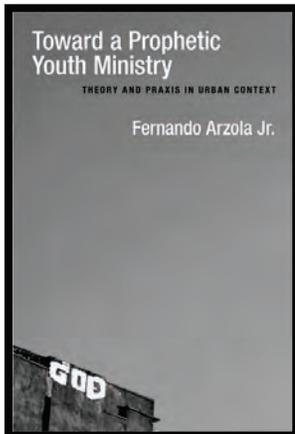
Toward Prophetic Youth Ministry: Theory and Praxis in Urban Context
Fernando Arzola Jr. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008) [$18]

Most of the resources and program models in youth ministry are conceived, tested and produced exclusively in the suburbs, and bring little to bear on the realities of urban youth culture. Fernando Arzola notes that youth ministries in large cities have tended to settle onto one of three paths: 1) a traditional paradigm that jealously guards the spiritual formation of its young people, 2) a liberal paradigm that concentrates exclusively on personal growth, and 3) an activist paradigm that galvanizes youth around the social concerns surrounding them. Fernando proposes a fourth way, a *prophetic paradigm* that integrates the three and cultivates young people who are spiritually rooted, emotionally mature and responsive to the needs of their community. He draws on various disciplines—from biology to sociology, from psychology to theology—to guide urban youth workers into an effective and transformational ministry to youth.
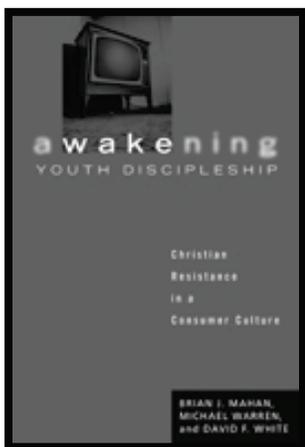
Awakening Youth Discipleship

Brian Mahan, Michael Warren, and David White (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008) [$17]

Youth ministry has increasingly lost touch with its origins in the way of Jesus and the social practices intrinsic to Christian discipleship, and has instead substituted layers of "Jesus talk," middle class values, fun and games, and doses of "warm fellow-feeling." *Awakening Youth Discipleship* articulates the history of this domestication of youth and ministry. Mahan, Warren, and White tell a story of the ways in which our society has colluded to shape a domesticated adolescence. The authors believe a Christian response to this challenge must be multilevel, addressing the problem at three levels—society, church, and individual. The authors propose reclaiming practices of discernment that both engage congregations in social awareness and involve individuals in discerning fuller vocational opportunities.
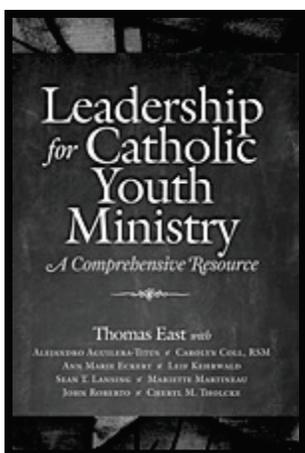
Leadership for Catholic Youth Ministry

Thomas East and the Center for Ministry Development (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2009) [$27.95]

*Leadership for Catholic Youth Ministry* presents the vision, theological foundations, and pastoral practice of Catholic youth ministry today, including the most current research and experience of parishes that are implementing effective youth ministries. Essays in this volume focus on the theory and practice of empowering young disciples, promoting active participation in the faith community, and providing for personal and spiritual growth of youth. Chapters include: 1) A Vision for Comprehensive Youth Ministry, 2) History of Catholic Youth Ministry, 3) Understanding Youth Today, 4) Ministry with Youth in a Culturally Diverse Church, 5) Models for Effective Youth Ministry, 6) Building Community with Youth, 7) Connecting with Families, 8) Connecting Youth with the Parish Community, 9) Catechesis, 10) Evangelization, 11) Justice and Service, 12) Pastoral Care, 13) Prayer and Worship, 14) Youth Ministry Leadership, and 15) Visioning and Planning.
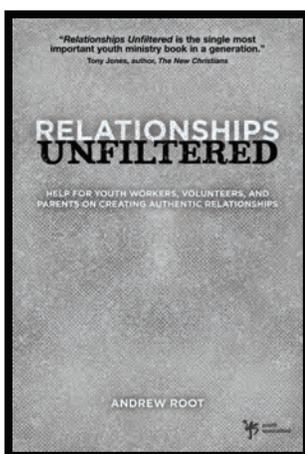
Relationships Unfiltered

Andrew Root (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) [$14.99]

For more than 50 years, relational or incarnational ministry has been a major focus in youth ministry. But for too long, those relationships have been used as tools—as a means to an end—where adults try to influence students to accept, know, trust, believe, or participate in something. It's possible that by focusing on these goals, we're not ministering the whole person and we run the risk of failing them and our ministry. In this thoughtful and insightful book, Andrew Root challenges us to reconsider our motives and begin to consider simply being with and doing life alongside teenagers with no agenda other than to love them right where they are, by place-sharing. As he shares stories of his (and others') successes and failures in relational youth ministry, you'll find practical ideas to help you recreate the role of relationships in your youth ministry. Chapters include: Relational Ministry as Place-Sharing, The Place-Sharer as Incarnate, The Place-Sharer as Crucified, the Place-Sharer as Resurrected, and Place-Sharing as God's Presence. (See also Andrew Root's 2007 book: *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry: From a Strategy of Influence to a Theology of Incarnate*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007.)
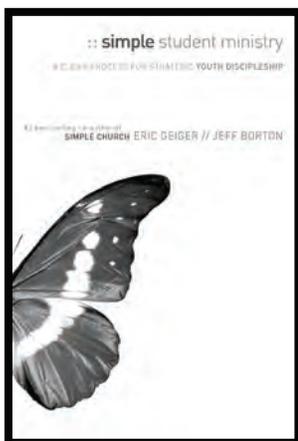
Simple Student Ministry: A Clear Process for Strategic Youth Discipleship
Andrew Root (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) [$16.99]

Simple Student Ministry fine tunes the proven methods of *Simple Church* for the unique field of youth discipleship. The book neatly unpacks the key ideas of Clarity, Movement, Alignment, and Focus that will transform any over-stimulated youth program into a simpler, more results-oriented spiritual development process. Fun is still allowed, by all means, but the ultimate emphasis on maturing faith is simply essential. Case study data gleaned from small to mega churches and parachurch ministries will give every youth leader a relatable reference point from which to begin the successful metamorphosis to Simple.
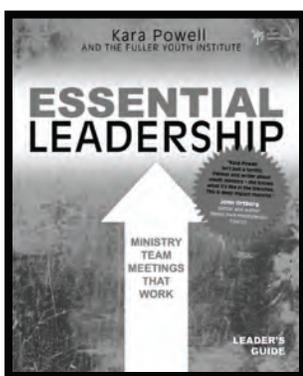
Essential Leadership: Ministry Team Meetings that Work
Kara Powell and the Fuller Youth Institute (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) [Leader's Guide-$14.99 and Participant's Guide-$9.99]

One of the keys to a strong youth ministry is adult leadership. And the key to a strong leadership team is a common vision and passion for both teenagers and the ministry. *Essential Leadership* is a research-based training resource that provides a year's worth of training modules that are both easy to use but also geared for contextualization based on the particular needs of leaders, teens, and communities. The curriculum includes a *Leader's Guide* with the training modules and a *Participant's Guide* for staff and volunteers that helps them apply the training to their lives and ministries during the weeks following the training. Topics include: 1) An Assessment of Your Ministry's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats; 2) Integrating Youth into the Life of the Church; 3) Effective Family Ministry; 4) Holistic Ministry: Giving Kids More Than Just a Bible Study; 5) Giving and Receiving Mentoring; 6) Getting the Rest You Need; 7) Deep Justice—Maximizing Your Next Service Experience or Missions Trip; 8) Helping Kids Through Hurt, Pain, and Trauma; and 9) Giving Your Kids a Faith that Lasts. (For more information and resources go to: www.fulleryouthinstitute.org.)
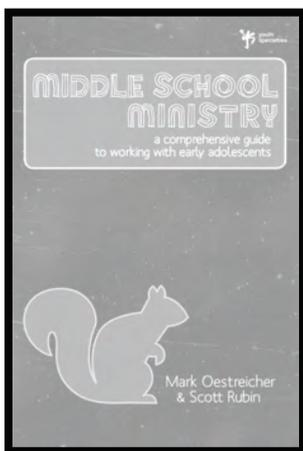
Middle School Ministry: A Comprehensive Guide to Working with Early Adolescents
Mark Oestreicher and Scott Rubin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) [$15.99]

This comprehensive and practical guide to middle school ministry by Mark Oestreicher and Scott Rubin helps youth workers understand the importance of middle school ministry, the development process for young teens and its implications for ministry, and how to best minister to these sometimes misunderstood students. The first section includes chapters that focus on young adolescent development from a variety of perspectives: physical and sexual, cognitive, psychological, emotional, relational, spiritual, and cultural. The second section includes chapters that focus on ministry with young adolescents: building relationships, ministry structure, small groups, effective and creative teaching, building a team, working with parents, and how to sustain leaders.

Special Research Report:
The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry
"The Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry"

In the past ten years there have been a number of excellent studies on the religious beliefs, practices, and attitudes of adolescents. Unique among these research projects is the "Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry" (EYM), funded by the Lilly Endowment. The EYM Project focused on identifying congregations that consistently establish faith as a vital factor in the lives of their youth and discovering what accounts for their effective approaches to ministry. Seven denominations were involved in the study: Assemblies of God, Evangelical Covenant Church, , Lutheran (ELCA), Presbyterian Church USA, Roman Catholic, Southern Baptist, and United Methodist. Dr. Roland Martinson of Luther Seminar was the project director.

Through quantitative research (surveys of youth, parents, adult youth ministry leaders, and church staff in 131 congregations selected because they nurture youth of vital faith) and qualitative research (on-site, in-depth interviews in 21 congregations) the study uncovered important findings that affirm the best in congregational youth ministry and provide direction for enhancing and expanding ministry with youth.

The survey results revealed that the 131 congregations selected for study were in fact nurturing youth of vital faith. Comparisons between these congregations and those of previous studies on 86 aspects of faith, congregational life, and youth ministry show that the congregations in the study scored significantly higher on 65 of those measures. The study identified 34 characteristics of maturing Christian youth based on prior research studies. Using these characteristics, the self-reports of young people (surveys) show significantly higher scores than those of youth participating in earlier national studies, especially in the areas of faith maturity, involvement in congregational activities, and positive rating of their congregation. Interviews with the young people, adult youth workers, youth ministers and pastors in these congregations strongly supported the picture of vital faith in the youth of these exemplary congregations. Indeed what was most impressive in the interviews was the depth and freshness with which these young people give expression to the content of their faith and the manner in which it deeply informed their lives. The data from both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the study provides overwhelming evidence that the young people in these congregations are men and women of vital faith.

It's All About Congregational Culture

The EYM congregations present a portrait of the strong impact faith communities can have on the faith and lives of young people when churches set their minds to fully enfranchise young people in their life and ministry. When pastors, congregational leaders, parents and adult leaders work together to promote real commitment to young people as full members of the body of Christ and carry that commitment across the life and mission of the entire congregation, teenagers mature in faith and grow to respect and love their church. The EYM Study demonstrates how age-level youth ministry and ministries with family are dependent upon and greatly enhanced by congregations setting young people and youth ministry as one of its essential priorities. If a congregation is not willing to make this commitment, youth and youth ministry will always be tangential and second rate. Congregational commitment to young people is essential for an effective ministry with youth.

While confirming the power of several well known youth ministry practices, the EYM Study pointed to a congregational "culture of the Spirit"— something more basic and central in establishing vital faith in youth. The research points to the value of a congregation's culture endowed with a palpable sense of the living, active presence of God at work among 1) the people of the whole congregation, 2) its ministries with youth, 3) its parents, 4) the ministries of the larger congregation, and 5) its congregational leaders (pastor, youth minister, adult and youth leaders) as providing the most powerful, pervasive influence these congregations have on young people long-term. It is the communal awareness of participation in God's presence and action that permeates the values, relationships, and activities of these congregations, giving rise to an atmosphere, a "culture of the Spirit," focused on mission and the transformation of life that seems to make them so influential in the lives and faith of young people.

At the heart of this "culture of the Spirit" is the belief that God is present, active, and alive in everything they do. These are congregations that live their belief that Jesus Christ is present and graciously at work in and through the body of Christ for the sake of the salvation of the world. Their commitment: *We, his disciples, his Church are called to pass on faith and call young people to discipleship, witness and service.* From these shared beliefs and commitments flow the practices of ministry with youth.

The congregational "culture of the Spirit" generates four spheres of relationships and practices that intersect and powerfully impact the lives of young people in the EYM congregations.
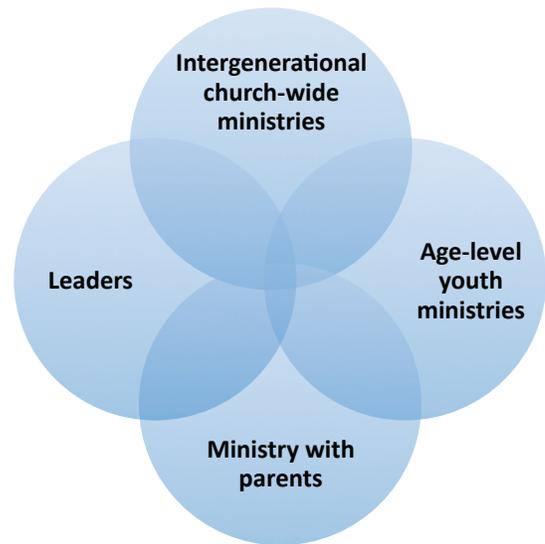
- First, these congregations' basic ministries are thoroughly **intergenerational**. Young people are welcomed and expected to participate and lead in church-wide ministries, including worship, education, fellowship, outreach, and decision-making.
- Second, these congregations have developed **age-level ministries** marked by trusted relationships and custom-designed ministry practices and activities within a caring atmosphere of high expectation. There are multiple nurturing relationships and activities intentionally planned to create an atmosphere of respect, growth and belonging that generates an "alternative youth subculture."
- Third, these congregations educate **parents** in the faith and equip them for family/household caring conversations, prayer, Bible reading, and service.
- Fourth, these congregations are blessed with competent, faith-filled, **leadership** from the pastor to the youth minister to the adult and youth leaders who are committed to young people and developing their faith lives.

Aligning and integrating the intergenerational ministries of the congregation with adolescent age-level ministries and families/households, supported by competent, faith-filled leaders, generates intersecting arenas of influence that seem to make the work of these congregations so significant in the lives of their mature Christian youth.

Part One. Youth of Maturing Faith

Using the research findings from previous studies on the beliefs and practices of committed Christian youth (such as "Effective Christian Education Study," Search Institute, 1986), a profile of 34 characteristics of committed, maturing Christian youth was developed for identifying congregations with high concentrations of youth with a vibrant faith.

Within the 131 congregations that were selected for the EYM study, 2252 young people completed the project survey which included questions reflecting the 34 characteristics. The survey findings from the 2252 young people provide strong and detailed evidence of their vital, maturing Christian faith. The teenagers demonstrated significantly higher scores than historical averages on scales which provide rich descriptions of the faith of these young people. For example, young people in the 131 congregations scored significantly higher (7.74 out of 9) on the "A Personal Christianity" scale which included the following items:

- *I know that Jesus Christ is the son of God who died on a cross and rose again.*
- *God is a close personal friend who guides and protects me.*
- *My life is committed to Jesus Christ.*
- *I see evidence that God is active in the world.*
- *I am keenly aware of the presence of God.*
- *God cares for me in a special way.*
- *I have a sense of being saved in Christ.*

These young people are typical teens in so many ways, facing the challenges and struggles and joys of growing up in America today. Yet in matters of faith, they possess a desire to know and follow God that defines them, shapes their character, and guides their lives.

The following ten themes (each reflecting a series of questions on the youth survey) were the most significant findings giving evidence of Christian youth of vital faith in the 131 congregations. (Each is correlated to one of the seven characteristics of maturing Christian youth.)

Characteristics of Maturing Christian Youth (9 = highest score)	Rating
1. Personal Christianity (Characteristics 1 and 2)	7.74
2. Moral Responsibility (Characteristic 6)	7.37
3. Defends and Supports Friends (Characteristic 5)	6.86
4. Faith Impact of Church Involvement (Characteristic 3)	6.83
5. Faith Maturity (All Characteristics)	6.50
6. Personal Religiousness (Characteristics 1 and 2)	6.36
7. Seeks Spiritual Growth (Characteristic 1)	5.76
8. God Consciousness (Characteristic 2)	5.38
9. Lives a Life of Service (Characteristic 5)	5.35
10. Speaks Publicly about One's Faith (Characteristic 2)	5.31

Seven Characteristics

The findings about youth of vital faith in EYM congregations can be summarized in seven significant characteristics.

Characteristic 1. Seeking Spiritual Growth

Youth of maturing faith are curious, actively pursuing questions of faith. They want to know what it means to believe in God and what it's like to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. They frequent Bible studies and small group discussions where they can voice their doubts, find answers to their questions, and learn how to speak intelligently about what they believe. These curious young people are open to the activity of God in their lives and regularly speak about seeking God's

guidance as well as asking friends what God has recently done in their lives. For these young people, their congregations and youth ministries provide settings where they have relationships through which they learn more about the faith and its implications for daily life. They worship, pray and study the Bible individually. These young people are integrating faith into their very self.

Characteristic 2. Possessing a Vital Faith

Youth of maturing faith are keenly aware of God: present and active in their lives, the lives of others, and the life of the world. God is experienced as an active presence, a "friend" who contributes to their lives as guide and protector. They talk about God in personal, intimate terms. They not only report that God is active in their lives, but they also see evidence of God's activity in others and the world.

Characteristic 3. Practicing Faith in Community

Youth of maturing faith actively practice their faith in Jesus Christ through regular attendance at worship, participation in ministry, and leadership in a congregation. In addition to faith's significant role in their day-to-day existence, these committed young people exercise their faith personally and publically through communal religious practices. They are eager to worship, pray, and participate in the community with adults throughout the ministries of the congregation. They see their church as an important part of their Christian lives, a place where God is active. Most importantly, they understand the church as more than just their youth ministry; they feel very much a part of the larger life of the congregation.

Adult Christians in these congregations, especially those involved in leadership in youth ministry have powerful influence in young peoples' lives. Most importantly, these young peoples' involvement in their church community is not just receiving the support of the adults; they see themselves as active participants in the ministry and vision of the congregation.

One gets a larger and perhaps even different picture of an effective ministry with youth from these young people's comments which reflect an inclusive intergenerational understanding of the church, an understanding of the church in which ministry with young people is a congregation-

wide commitment, a ministry in which young people become "fully practicing participants."

Characteristic 4. Making the Christian Faith a Way of Life

Youth of maturing faith recognize God's "call" and integrate their beliefs into the conversations, decisions, and actions of daily life. In addition to believing in Jesus Christ, these young people claim that faith makes a difference in their lives and regularly speak about and act-out their faith with family and friends, and even strangers. Faith is a driving force in their lives. When speaking about reasons for what they do, they mention faith as a significant impetus for their actions. They also speak about the Christian faith as a necessary force in society that helps them and others develop defined, constructive values and attitudes. For these committed Christian adolescents, faith is not something just to know or to understand, or even to believe. Faith is something one lives; something one does; something one is.

Characteristic 5. Living a Life of Service

Youth of maturing faith are "turned outward from themselves" toward others and the world. In speech and action they serve others and take public stands on moral issues and advocate for justice. They reach out to neighbors and friends in times of crises with comfort and support. They have friends of diverse socioeconomic, ethnic and religious backgrounds. They are especially concerned about the "shunned" or "difficult" or "losers." These young people get involved in church and community. For them faith is active participation in Gods' mission in the world. The importance of service in their lives is yet another example of the integrative faith of these young people. Their faith is expressed in action for the sake of others.

Characteristic 6. Exercising Moral Responsibility

Youth of maturing faith involve their faith in God in their decision-making and direction-setting. Through Bible study, conversation with Christian friends, prayer and "faith-informed reflection," God helps them determine right or wrong as well as supports them in their decisions. These adolescents find God calling them to help others. They discourage others from being irresponsible

or dishonest. They know the moral decisions they make now will affect their future. They see hurtful actions taken not only as damaging to other people, but also as sin against God. These young people are known for their honesty, integrity, hospitality and kindness.

Characteristic 7. Possessing a Positive Spirit

Youth of maturing faith are optimistic and full of hope. They are convinced they can make the world a better place. This positive spirit is reflected in their participation in the lives of other Christian youth for whom they have high regard, care for, and frequently defend. In a world where adolescent development is consistently disconnected from spirituality, these young people are concrete examples of how spiritual development appears to have generated a hopeful, confident spirit that characterizes their sense of self and their positive stance toward one another and the world.

It is clear from the research findings that congregations *can* nurture youth of vital Christian faith. The study found congregations with high percentages of committed, maturing Christian youth. What's going on in these congregations that is contributing to vital faith in young people? What are these congregations doing that is making a difference in the faith lives of young people? What are the qualities and practices of these congregations that can serve as a guide for all congregations? To these questions we now turn our attention.

Part Two. Faith Assets™: A Framework for Developing Youth of Vital Faith

One of the most important contributions of the Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry is the identification of 44 Faith Assets™ that contribute to the development of a vital Christian faith in young people. Developed from the survey results of the 131 "exemplary" congregations and the on-site interviews with 21 of these congregations (3 in each of the 7 denominations), the Faith Assets are elements or building blocks that constitute a framework for developing faith in young people. The study points to these 44 elements as ways and means through which

congregations have over time, with great effort and struggle, built their capacities to influence the faith and lives of young people.
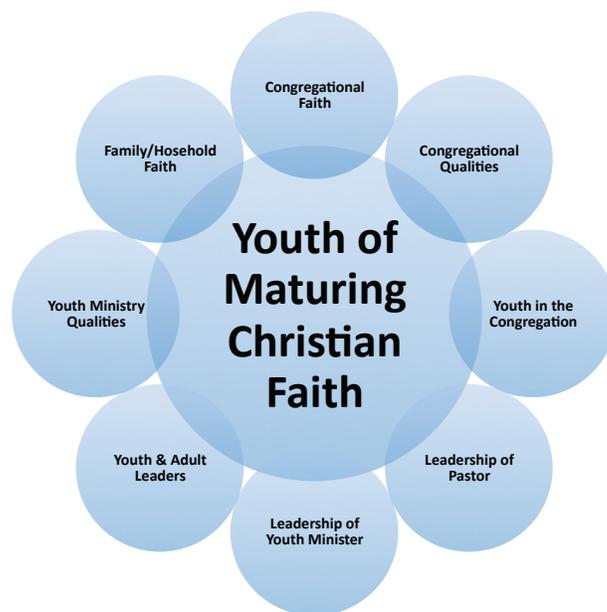
The 44 Faith Assets are grouped into three categories:

- ■ **Congregational Assets**
1. Congregational Faith
2. Leadership of the Pastor
3. Congregational Qualities
4. Youth Involvement in the Congregation

The 22 Congregational Faith Assets describe the values and dynamics of the intergenerational life and ministry of the larger congregation. One of the major findings from the research study is the emphasis on congregational culture as essential for nurturing youth of maturing Christian faith and for sustaining an effective youth ministry. The Congregational Faith Assets reflect attributes the congregation as a whole brings to its relationships with youth. These 22 Faith Assets describe aspects of the congregation's theological orientation, faith maturity, pastoral leadership, values, attitudes, and practices that bear directly on its capacity to engage and influence young people. Each Faith Asset identifies an element of the congregation's overall functioning that contributes to effective ministries with youth.

- ■ **Youth Ministry Assets**
1. The Leadership of the Youth Minister
2. Adult and Youth Leaders
3. Youth Ministry Qualities

This 17 Youth Ministry Faith Assets describe the quality of the congregation's age-level ministries with youth. Six of these Faith Assets express the strength of the primary youth minister in the congregation. Five of the Faith Assets describe the effectiveness of the peer and adult leadership in youth ministry. Six of the Faith Assets indicate the attitudes, expectations and practices of the congregation's age-level ministries with youth. These 17 Faith Assets describe a kind of age-level "subculture" of quality ministry within the larger intergenerational culture of quality ministry with young people.

■ **Family/Household Faith Assets**
The 4 Family/Household Faith Assets describe the importance of family faith, adding another influence to the youth-friendly culture of the whole congregation and the effective age-level ministry with youth. The Family/Household Faith Assets describe the faith life and faith practices at home, and the role of the congregation in equipping and support parental and family faith.

What emerges from the 44 Faith Assets is four integrated overlapping spheres of influence: 1) congregational life and ministries, 2) age-level youth ministry, 3) family/household faith, and 4) congregational leadership (the competent and effective leadership of pastors, youth ministers, and adult and youth leaders).
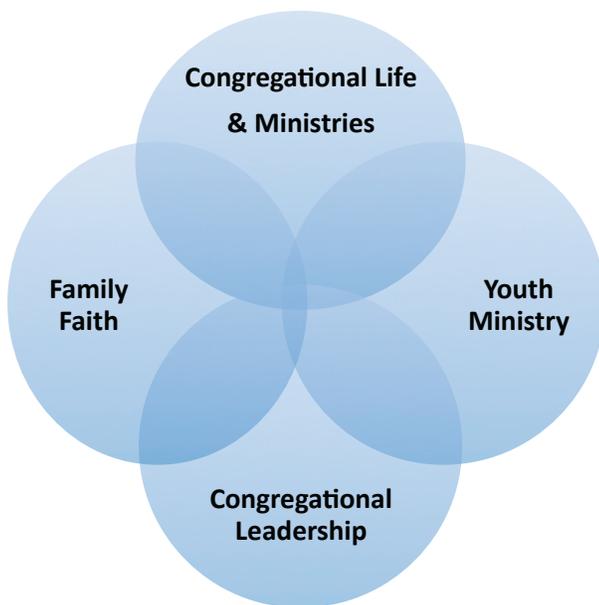
It is important to remember that the 44 Faith Assets are descriptive, not prescriptive. They are not *the* definitive list. They are part of a growing body of knowledge about faith maturing in youth. They are a roadmap for developing congregations and youth ministries that promote youth of maturing faith. The 44 Faith Assets are cumulative. They build on each other. The more the better for everyone involved: the congregation, leaders, families, and young people. The key is working toward the "tipping point" when the cumulative effect of the 44 Faith Assets creates a congregational spirit and culture that maximizes efforts to nurture youth of maturing Christian faith.

An "asset-building mentality" counteracts so many stereotypes about youth ministry. For example, it confronts the "deficit mentality"—the popular misconception that we need to "solve the youth problem" or that we need to intervene to help youth through their many crises. It also counteracts the continual search for the one magic formula, activity, or program that will turn a youth ministry into superstar status. Lastly, it counteracts the myth that only large congregations with lots of resources and staff can do effective youth ministry. In an asset-building approach, *every congregation has Faith Assets*. It is only a question of how many assets. Congregations need to discover the Faith Assets that are already at work and then chart a plan for developing more assets. An asset building approach offers very tangible qualities and practices that every congregation can adopt that contribute to an effective youth ministry and nurturing youth of maturing Christian faith.

1. Congregation Faith and Qualities

What kind of congregational faith and life nurtures youth of maturing Christian faith? A surprising discovery emerges from the findings of the EYM study: *entire congregations make a difference in youth ministry*. The congregations in the study are powerful faith- and life-shaping systems. Youth ministry doesn't exist on the side of or separate from the entire life and ministries of the congregation. Youth ministry is integrated into and supported by the congregation as a whole. Data from this study indicates that effective youth ministry exists as an integral dimension of a youth-friendly, youth-engaging congregation.

A> Congregational Faith

One cluster of Faith Assets focuses largely on the congregation's theological commitments and the strategic decisions and patterns of ministry that flow from those theological commitments.

Asset 1. God's Living Presence: The congregation possesses a sense of God's living presence in community, at worship, through study, and in service.

Asset 2. Centrality of Faith: The congregation recognizes and participates in God's sustaining and transforming life and work.

Asset 3. Emphasizes Prayer: The congregation practices the presence of God as individuals and community through prayer and worship.

Asset 4. Focuses on Discipleship: The congregation is committed to knowing and following Jesus Christ.

Asset 5. Emphasizes Scripture: The congregation values the authority of Scripture in its life and mission.

Asset 6. Centrality of Mission: The congregation consistently witnesses, serves and promotes moral responsibility, and seeks justice.

The study's data reflects theological commitments and ministry practices that flow from a sense of the living presence and activity of God. These commitments and practices find expression in several key themes:

- Scripture and most especially the Gospel are understood as prime "bearers" of God's presence.
- Bible study and biblical literacy are extensive and substantive. Bible study and biblical knowledge are pursued as opportunities to "encounter God speaking to people today."
- Congregational faith, life, and ministry are grounded in Jesus Christ—present and active within individuals and the whole community.
- Worship within the life of the community is understood as participation in the life and presence of God in the world.
- Prayer is a pervasive, core activity attached to every dimension of the congregation's relationships, decisions, and activities.
- God's presence is named and celebrated in the everyday life and work of youth and adults.

These themes and the Faith Assets are supported by findings from the research, as reflected in the six scales (series of questions.) in the chart. Notice the high degree of shared perceptions among youth, parents, and adult leaders in youth ministry.

Characteristics of Congregational Faith (9 = highest score)	Youth	Parents	Adult Leaders
Congregation's Biblical Emphasis	7.16		
Congregation's Moral Guidance	6.60	6.81	6.96
Teaches Core Christian Concepts		6.95	
Worship Services' Positive Characteristics	6.29	6.27	6.40
Congregation Promotes Service	6.40	6.42	6.43
Congregation's Mission Outreach	6.71		6.04

As we will see in the Youth Ministry Assets, the theological commitments of the congregation as a whole become the theological commitments of the congregation's youth ministry. For example, because of the centrality of the Gospel and discipleship in congregational life, knowing Jesus Christ and following him in discipleship are at the core of these congregations' youth ministries. A second example of this dynamic at work is the alignment of the mission/vision statements of the congregation and its youth ministry, reflecting striking similarities of both identity and mission. In part, the power of these congregations and their youth ministries lies in the integration of vision and mission.

B> Congregational Qualities

Ten Faith Assets reflect congregational values, expectations and practices that promote respect for youth and the inclusion of youth in congregational life. These congregational qualities describe how the life and ministry of the congregation can engage youth and make a substantive contribution to their maturing faith.

Asset 11. Supports Youth Ministry: Youth and ministry with young people are high priorities for the congregation.

Asset 12. Demonstrates Hospitality: The congregation values and welcomes all people, especially youth.,

Asset 13. Strives for Excellence: The congregation sets high standards, evaluates, and engages in continuous improvement.

Asset 14. Encourages Thinking: The congregation welcomes questions and reflection on faith and life.

Asset 15. Creates Community: Congregational life reflects high quality personal and group relationships.

Asset 16. Encourages Small Groups: The congregation engages members in study, conversation, and prayer about faith in daily life.

Asset 17. Promotes Worship: The congregation expands and renews spirit-filled, uplifting worship.

Asset 18. Fosters Ethical Responsibility: The congregation encourages individual and social moral responsibility.

Asset 19. Promotes Service: The congregation sponsors outreach, service projects, and cultural immersions both locally and globally.

Asset 20. Demonstrates Effective Practices: The congregation engages in a wide variety of ministry practices and activities.

The impact of the congregations' integration of young people into the fabric of their lives and ministries is evident in the attitudes of their youth. The overall culture and climate of these congregations deeply impacts their young people as evidenced in the following scales (a set of survey questions) on the quality of congregational life. Young people's responses to questions regarding the life of their congregation demonstrate the content and force of their churches' influence in their lives. Notice how youth's perceptions are also reinforced by parents and adult leaders.

Congregational Qualities (9 = highest score)	Youth	Parents	Adult Leaders
Warm, Challenging Climate	7.05		
Welcoming Atmosphere		6.96	7.21
Satisfied with Congregation	6.93		
Importance of this Church to Me		7.73	7.96
Congregation's Moral Guidance	6.60	6.81	6.96
Congregation's Social Interaction	6.55	5.18	5.22
Congregation's Openness	6.35		
Members Experience Love and Support		6.92	

In the EYM congregations getting to know a personal and present God involves more than learning dogma or obeying a particular set of rules. These young people come to know a living and active God through relationships with God and the community. Certainly, young people learn the Gospel, the story of Christ, his teachings, and the rich and substantive Christian traditions. The young people in these congregations get to know Jesus Christ through the witness of believers and ongoing relationships with persons and communities who know Him. ***The power of faithful, multi-generational Christian relationships ("sociality") is at the heart of effective youth ministry.***

C> Youth Involvement in the Congregation

Two Faith Assets describe young people as full participants in the body of Christ who are given spiritual gifts necessary for the life of the congregation. The gifts of young people are identified, developed, and utilized as youth are invited into leadership and equipped for full ministry in the church and the world. Young people are encouraged to participate in all aspects of the congregation's life and ministry.

Asset 21. Participate in the Congregation: Youth are engaged in a wide spectrum of congregational relationships and practices.

Asset 22. Assume Ministry Leadership: Youth are invited, equipped and affirmed for leadership in congregational activities.

The findings from the survey confirm young people's positive experience of involvement in congregational life and ministries. These youth see their congregations to be effective and important to them in areas influential to their relationship with God. They are especially appreciative of their participation in congregational activities that receive significantly high scores.

Characteristics of Youth Involvement in the Congregation and Church Activities (9 = highest score)	Youth
Emphasis on Youth Participation in Congregation and Community by the Youth Ministry	7.16
Faith Impact of Church Involvement	6.83
Church Friendships	6.71
Church-Sponsored Trips	6.68
Faith-Influential Friends	6.40

Church Leadership Development Activities	5.91
Music Involvement	4.57

In contrast to many congregations who build relational youth ministries separate from the larger congregation, the youth ministries of the EYM congregations welcome young people into the center of the congregation's life together. The same relational qualities present in their youth ministries are evident in the life of these congregations as a whole.

Conclusion

Young people's responses to these closely related items of congregational life and ministry demonstrate that youth in these exemplary congregations have a keen perception of and appreciation for their churches' substantive faithfulness and effectiveness in the lives of their members, including themselves. The ministry of the entire congregation is a major factor in young people's faith development and their eagerness to be a part of the community's relationships and practices. The study presents a picture of welcoming congregations who respect and value young people and their youth ministries. These congregations involve youth and adults in genuinely integrated relationships and activities. The mission and vision of their youth ministries are aligned with the mission and vision of the church, indeed, their youth ministries often lead the way. Their worship styles reflect an awareness of the sensibilities of their youth; the worship life of the young people often inspires adults to worship in fresh ways.

The essential message from this data, points to youth ministry as a valued, critical element of these congregation's mission and vision. Youth ministry matters in these congregations and the ministries of the entire congregation contribute substantively to faithful and effective ministry with young people.

2. Youth Ministry Qualities

For the majority of the congregations in the study, their age-level youth ministries grow out of shared commitments and practices that emerge from a relational approach to making disciples with young people. These congregations minister through foundational relationships and practices uniquely and meaningfully adapted to their contexts.

The effectiveness of a congregation's youth ministry does not lie in expansive programs. When asked why their congregation is able to do a good job in nurturing youth of maturing faith, 134 pastors and youth ministers in the 131 EYM congregations indicated that "it is the vision and strong support given by our congregation" and 109 of them indicated that, "(it is) the wide variety and nature of our youth ministries."

Six Faith Assets describes the qualities of a congregation's youth ministry—the beliefs, expectations and practices that mark age-level ministry with youth. Woven through the six Faith Assets is the use of a variety of ministry practices that are "custom-designed" to address the real lives of young people in a particular congregation.

> **Asset 34. Establishes a Caring Environment**: Youth ministry provides multiple nurturing relationships and activities resulting in a welcoming atmosphere of respect, growth, and belonging.
> **Asset 35. Develops Quality Relationship**: Youth ministry develops authentic relationships among youth and adults establishing an environment of presence and life engagement.
> **Asset 36. Focuses on Jesus Christ**: Youth ministry's mission, practices, and relationships are inspired by the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.
> **Asset 37. Considers Life Issues**: Youth ministry values and addresses the full range of young people's lives.
> **Asset 38. Uses Many Approaches**: Youth ministry intentionally and creatively employs multiple activities appropriate to the ministry's mission and context.
> **Asset 39. Organized and Planned**: Youth ministry engages participants and leaders in long range planning, implementation, evaluation, and innovation in an atmosphere of high expectations.

These Faith Assets are reflected in the survey findings on Youth Ministry Qualities. Youth, parents, adults leaders, pastors and youth ministers in EYM congregations identify the most important qualities of an effective youth ministry, providing very positive ratings for congregation's efforts. Among the most important qualities that young people identify are the faith impact of youth ministry on their lives (see items 6 and 7), the relational and community qualities of

youth ministry (see items 1, 2, 3, 7), and distinct program features of a youth ministry such as well-organized, qualified adult leaders, creative and fun (see items 4 and 5). All groups affirm the importance and effectiveness of peer ministry (see item 8). Youth, parents, and adult leaders confirm the achievement of youth ministry's desired outcomes (see 9).

Youth Ministry Qualities (9 = highest score)	Y	P	AL	P & YM
1. Spiritual Support Group	8.39			
2. Emphasis on Prayer, Faith Study, Leadership, Safe and Caring Place	7.55			
3. Youth Gatherings Have a Warm, Welcoming Climate	7.44			
4. Youth Ministry's Structural Core (e.g., qualified youth workers, well run and organized, Christ-centered, safe and caring place)	7.36			
5. Youth Ministry Characteristics (Christ-centered, meaningful, creative, fun, qualified adult youth leaders, well organized)			7.25	
6. Impact on Personal Faith	7.28			
7. Emphasis on Participation in Congregation	7.16			
8. Peer Ministry	7.14	6.44	6.55	5.80
9. Achievement of Youth Ministry's Desired Outcomes (e.g., involving youth in ministry, creating community, helping youth making a commitment to Christ, connecting service involvement with Christian faith)	6.75	6.52	6.60	
10. Youth Ministry Effectiveness (e.g., achievement of desired outcomes, training adult and youth leaders, working with families)				6.08
11. Help with Life Issues	5.82			
12. Teaching Moral Values		6.60		
13. Adult-Youth Mentoring		6.56	6.31	
14. Adult-Youth Involvement Together		5.28	5.02	

[Y=youth, P=parents, AL=adult leaders, P=pastor, Y=youth minister]

Caring Environment & Quality Relationships

Youth ministries in the study work from a foundation of authentic relationships and a caring environment. EYM congregations provide youth with a variety of settings and environments where their love of Jesus Christ becomes a relational lived experience. This can be seen in young people's very positive responses to "spiritual support group" (item 1), "emphasis on safe and caring place" (item 2) and "youth gatherings have a warm, welcoming climate" (item 3). A caring environment and quality relationships undergird worship, Bible study, classes, faith and life groups, music ministries, mission trips, and a multitude of other youth ministry practices. Pastors, youth ministers, and adult leaders facilitate the development of genuine relationships among adults and youth in these faith communities. Small groups are present everywhere in these youth ministries. Small groups encourage youth to speak out on issues and address concerns in their everyday lives. Small groups focus on Scripture and the discussion of young people's questions. They regularly include meditation, prayer, silence, rituals, and spiritual reflection. .

The EYM congregations find ways to involve young people in peer relationships throughout the life and ministry of the congregation. These church friends are a positive influence on each other's faith and significant contributors to each others' vitality and resiliency. These congregations reflected the power of peer relationships in small, intimate circles of youth in which community and strong relationships thrived. These groups were described as safe and welcoming environments by the participants of the study and consistently included engaging Bible study, prayer and service.

Youth-Adult Mentoring

EYM congregations bring adults and youth together through adult-youth mentoring, which was highly rated by parents and adult leaders (items 13 and 14 above). These youth ministries recruit mature Christian adults who invest in young people. Youth in these churches report that these experiences help them grow in their faith. Adults sense the value of the mentoring and are honored to work with youth. These positive experiences with mentoring are communicated throughout the congregations which "fuels" the recruitment of new mentors. Several

congregations reported "relationship-based" ministries with adult-youth mentoring as the "centerpieces" of their work. In these ministries relationships are fostered through carefully designed practices that support adult-youth and peer-to-peer faith mentoring conversations. The development of caring adult youth leaders was essential to the substance of the youth ministries in the EYM congregations.

Prayer

Prayer, in a variety of forms and settings, is an emphasis in EYM congregations and their youth ministries (see item 2 and the Congregational Faith Assets). Prayer is integrated in all youth ministry programs and activities. Young people study about prayer and learn how to pray. Adults in the congregations prayed specifically and persistently for young people by group and by name.

Retreats

All of the 21 congregations studied through on-site visits discovered that something uniquely transformative occurs when their ministries take youth out of the ordinary rhythms and settings of their lives into focused, intense experiences of God and God's action through retreats of spiritual exploration and mission. Retreats are transformational process in which young people encounter God first-hand. For young people these are times when information about God becomes an opportunity to meet God, to expand their understandings of God and his activity, and to know God first-hand as God changed the world through them.

Service and Outreach

Service and outreach is a distinctive strength of the EYM congregations and their youth ministries. Pastors, youth ministers, parents, adult youth workers, and youth are seriously emphasizing, equipping for, and engaging in service and outreach. They see their congregations as valuing "Mission Outreach," "Social Responsibility," and "Service Activities." They see their congregations preparing young people and adults for mission. Second, young people are becoming and doing what the congregations are equipping them to do. They are

involved in service and active in public witness and ministry.

Service and Outreach Characteristics (9 = highest score)	Youth	Parents	Adult Leaders	Pastors & Youth Minister
Lives a Life of Service	5.35			
Mission Effectiveness of the Congregation	6.71			
Congregation Promotes Service Activities	6.40	6.42	6.43	
Youth's Service Involvement		7.30	7.62	7.71
Youth's Outreach		6.50	6.50	6.78
Social Responsibility		6.16	6.56	
Congregation's Mission Outreach		5.82	6.04	

Custom-Designed Youth Ministry Practices, Programs, and Activities

Youth ministry in EYM congregations might well be characterized as "ordinary practices done extraordinarily well" in response to the needs of youth in their communities. These custom-designed youth ministry practices can be seen in the wide variety of activities in these youth ministries sponsor. The following practices, programs, and activities are a part of the youth ministry offerings in most of the EYM congregations: 1) community life and relationships, 2) Bible study, 3) religious education, 4) retreats, 5) mission trips and service projects, 6) social events, 7) sports, 8) family and intergenerational activities, 9) youth-oriented worship, 10) adult and youth leadership training, and 11) special events such as youth conventions.

Innovative and unique approaches to custom-designed youth ministries flow from the congregations' pastoral and youth ministry leadership teams. Over 85% of the youth ministers surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "Doing things in new and creative ways is appreciated by my senior/lead pastor or supervisor." Nearly 70% of the ministers described their congregations as being "willing to change the way things are done to increase involvement in the church." Over half of the ministers (58.5%) either agreed or strongly agreed that their congregation is innovative. These creative and

innovative EYM youth ministries take place in the context of respect and openness in congregations that are willing to take risks and accept change.

Jesus Christ and Discipleship

One could sum up the purpose of the EYM congregations' youth ministries in a single goal: *making disciples of Jesus Christ*. These congregations focus their youth ministries on Jesus Christ and engage young people in discipleship, witness, and service that transforms their lives. Several "marks and means" of discipleship emerge in the study. These elements describe the core attributes of the congregations, their youth ministries, and their young people.

- **Disciples Know Jesus Christ:** Discipleship is grounded in the teachings, life, death, resurrection and Lordship of Jesus Christ alive and present. Disciples are in relationship with Christ, learn about Christ and follow Christ's leading. In the vast majority of congregations in the study, youth ministry is consciously designed to cultivate a relationship with Jesus Christ through worship, prayer, community-building, study, retreats, and service.

- **Disciples Know the Bible:** Discipleship is anchored in Bible study. It is in the Bible that youth learn the story, the truth, that shapes the life of faith. Bible studies take many shapes and forms. Most popular are small group conversational explorations of the Scripture texts in which youth and their leaders "hear" God speaking truth to their lives. Bible studies are a constitutive exercise in discipleship.

- **Disciples Know the Christian Faith:** Discipleship is learning the Christian faith. The Christian faith has a history, traditions, beliefs and values that are critical to its shaping and transforming power. Congregations are committed to teaching young people the content of the Christian faith through a variety of ministry experiences. Adult leaders guide young people in exploring the long and rich life of the people of God, creating more sturdy beliefs, engaging the tough questions, and assisting youth in finding their own "faith voice."

- **Disciples Make Faith a Way of Life:** Discipleship is the "knowledge of faith" becoming a way of life. Discipleship is regularly described as much in languages of the "heart" and the "hands" as of the "head." For the congregations in the study, it was not enough for young people to know the content of Scripture or to understand the richness of Christian beliefs. Whether small or large these churches developed expansive ministries with youth for the purpose of participating in faith as a way of life. The adults and youth in these ministries seemed to be "living into" faith that is simultaneously centered in God yet genuinely their own. They spoke about what they believed with conviction and in fresh language. Compassion, honesty, respect, integrity, service to others and justice were evident in their speech, life styles and relationships with others. All this was carried on with an eye on both tradition and experience; text and context; faith and life.

- **Disciples are Mentored:** Discipleship is formed in relationships with mentoring individuals and communities. Even though discipleship is primarily a faith-relationship in which Christ is at the center, adolescent disciples are formed in relationship with other Christians. Whole congregations become intergenerational crucibles in which conversation, relationships and practices wrap youth in a culture of "knowing and doing God." Within these congregations, people walk intentionally and directly along side young people providing diverse, concrete "snapshots" of following Jesus Christ as these mentors encourage and teach through their presence, speech and action.

- **Disciples are Equipped:** A young person's strengths and gifts of the Spirit are integral to discipleship. To follow Christ involves a call to witness and to serve others. To make disciples is to identify a teenager's spiritual gifts and equip that teenager for service in the church and the world. Congregations combine study, fellowship, personal strengths and spiritual gifts discovery with service to equip young disciples to follow Jesus Christ in the church and into the world.

An Emerging Pattern of Youth Ministry

Based on the analysis of the results from the visits and interviews of the 21 EYM congregations, a "pattern" to their youth ministries began to emerge.

- Focus on ministry with youth "outside as well as within" the faith community.
- Make contact with those who do not belong to a congregation or who don't know Christ or who are different or in need.
- Speak with outsiders about faith and Jesus Christ and/or serve them at their point of need.
- Invite those outside the congregation to experience Jesus Christ through participation in his "body," the community of faith.
- When new people come, welcome them into the faith community and encourage them to stay and become participants in it's life.
- Through worship, prayer, Bible study, discipleship groups, and ongoing faith relationships (e.g., mentoring) nurture young people's life and faith.
- Identify young people's strengths and gifts and invite them into leadership utilizing their "giftedness" to build up the body of Christ.
- Equip young people both for leadership within the congregation and for following Christ in the world.
- Send young people out into the world to serve others and bear witness to Jesus Christ.

While not every congregation articulated all of these elements, and each congregation worked at the elements of the pattern differently, one could see a flow of "welcoming, instructing, equipping and sending" at work in the congregation's mission statements and strategies of ministry. What's more, "sending into the world" seemed to be integral to the congregation's understanding of a young person's relationship with God. For these ministries with youth, the life of faith includes, in its dynamics and its maturity, following Christ into witness and service in the world. Doing Christ's mission in the world, these young Christians meet God in new ways, are drawn outside their egocentricity, and come to understand more fully the creative, restorative and transformative work of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

3. Family and Household Faith

Five Faith Assets describe the role of family/household faith, adding another influence to the youth-friendly culture of the whole congregation and the effective age-level ministry with youth. The family/household Faith Assets describe faith practices at home and the role of the congregation in equipping and support parental and family faith.

Asset 40. Possess Strong Parental Faith: Parents possess and practice a vital and informed faith. A vital and informed parental faith includes understanding the Christian faith, participating in worship, praying, and engaging in service and mission. Young people are in households and relationships with parents where mature faith is cultivated and modeled.

Asset 41. Promotes Family Faith Practices: Parents engage youth and the whole family in conversations, prayer, Bible reading, and service that nurture faith and life. Parents not only know and live Christianity themselves, they draw their teenagers into faith practices. Parents pray with their adolescents at table, at family celebrations, during times of crises and over individual and family decisions. Service is a way of life. Together parents and young people "turn their faces outward" and live life for others.

Asset 42. Reflects Family Harmony: Family members' expressions of respect and love create an atmosphere promoting faith. Families and households find ways to navigate the challenges and stresses of daily life with approaches marked by respect, equal regard, open communication, and cooperation. Parents, grandparents and others practice individual accountability, forgiveness and reconciliation modeling faith in action and generating an atmosphere where faith can be referenced and discussed.

Asset 43. Equips Parents: The congregation offers instruction and guidance that nurture parental faith and equip parents for nurturing faith at home. Congregations provide strong adult faith formation,

emphasizing adult discipleship and offering strong preaching, Bible studies, small groups and many forms of adult Christian education. Programs develop parental faith and prepare parents for nurturing the faith of their children and adolescents.

Asset 44. Fosters Parent-Youth Relationships: The congregation offers parent-youth activities that strengthen parent-youth relationships. Parent-youth programs focus on adolescent-specific issues such as family communication, adolescent independence, decision-making, choosing friends, sexual expression, and conflict resolution; as well as faith themes such as studying the Bible together, discussing case studies from youth culture, and exploring popular media. Parent-youth programs enhance the capacity of parents and teenagers to communicate and work together on matters of faith and life.

Faith Influence of Parents and Families

Echoing other major studies of adolescent faith formation conducted in the last two decades, the EYM study affirms the contribution that parents and other family members make to the faith maturity of youth. Young people reference their parents' faith as models of the Christian life. Teenagers talk about their parents and friends of their parents reaching out to care for them. Young people know about their parents' vital faith not only from observing them at church, but also from conversations about faith and daily life at meals, in the car or on intergenerational, family mission trips—practices encouraged by the church's ministry with families. These parents read the Bible and pray with their teenagers. They include their young people in faith-informed discussions of family decision and budgets. These discussions have been encouraged by parent-youth case study conversations during youth ministry activities.

Influence of Family as Rated by Youth (9 = highest score)	
Family Harmony (Lack of Family Disharmony)	7.19
Parents Are Affectionate	6.83
Lack of Parental Verbal Abuse	6.41
Mother Helps with Problems	6.29
Mother Influences My Faith	6.15
Father Helps with Problems	5.60
Family Influences My Faith	5.41

Parent and Family Faith Qualities (9 = highest score)	
God Consciousness	8.23
Moral Responsibility	7.97
Family Disharmony	7.03
Family Orientation	7.02
Use of Faith Support Group	6.70
Centrality of Faith	6.99
Social Responsibility	6.16
Desire for Participating in Leadership, Community, and Spirituality	6.49

One of the study's scales, "Family Influences My Faith," includes the question: "How often does your family (the people you live with) sit down together and talk about God, the Bible, or other religious things?" One in four young people said their family does this on a weekly or daily basis, and 40% once or twice a month. The percentages of how often the families sit down together to talk about God or matters of faith are significantly higher than those in previous studies. Young people in exemplary congregations explore understandings of God and matters of faith in their families. Faith instruction does not only occur in the congregation and youth ministry. Families reinforce what's learned at church through intentional faith practices and conversations at home.

The family's capacity to influence adolescent faith can also be seen in the spiritual guidance and modeling of fathers, mothers, and extended family members. Both mothers and fathers were identified as positive influences on young peoples' faith, with fathers especially, scoring significantly higher than in previous studies.

Equipping Parents to Pass on Faith

During the last twenty years youth ministry has reclaimed the role of family in faith formation. This renewed involvement of families in ministry with young people is evident in the values and practices of the congregations of the study. Congregations in the study have invited parents into partnership with the church in nurturing the faith of their sons and daughters. Parents exercise their partnership by participating in assessment and planning. They become the eyes and ears for the youth minister as they listen to what other parents are saying and experiencing. These parents provide realistic perspectives on what is going well in the congregation's ministry with youth as well as identify

challenges that need attention in their own families and the families of the community.

Ministry with families strengthens parenting skills especially around the developmental needs of teenagers. Parent sessions address topics of interest to parents of youth by serving as a safe place where concerned parents can work with their issues and questions. Youth ministers meet with groups of parents to evaluate past events and get their input on ministry direction and upcoming events. Congregations in the study create networks of ministry in which parents, youth, and extended families are instructed and healed. These networks of support for families provide a framework in which parents deepen their faith, grow in their ability to raise teenagers and expand their capacities to nurture faith in their young people.

Here are the ratings of the effectiveness of the EYM youth ministries in working with parents.

Youth Ministry & Parents Characteristics (9 = highest score)	Adult Leaders	Pastor & Youth Minister
Adult Workers' Relationship with Parents	6.93	
Helps Parents with Parenting Issues	5.23	
Effectiveness of Parental Education	3.97	
Strengthening Parent-Youth Relationships		4.41
Support of Families in Conflict Situations		4.16
Equipping Parents		4.70

Youth ministers in the study noted the contribution their ministries make to strengthening families and parents. One scale, "Strengthening Parent-Youth Relationships," reflects scores significantly higher than those in a recent national study of full time youth ministers. Ministers were asked, "How well is each of these aspects of your congregation's youth ministry being achieved or realized?" Their responses included:

- Helping parents become more involved in the lives of their youth
- Providing opportunities for teens and parents to interact
- Helping parents recognize and adopt wise methods of discipline
- Strengthening family relationships
- Providing help for teaching Christian concepts of right and wrong

The significantly higher scores on these items might well be related to the close family relationships that exist in most of the congregations studied. These high scores could also be a reason these families have more positive influence on the faith of their teenagers than parents in previous studies.

Strengthening a family's capacity to nurture life and pass on faith to their young people is evident in the study. One scale, "Equipping Parents," contained the key elements on which congregations in the study scored higher than those in historical studies:

- Providing education and resources parents needed to teach their youth Christian concepts of right and wrong
- Encouraging parent-youth communication through classes on how to discuss adolescent issues with youth
- Helping parents share their faith with their youth at home by such things as rituals, faith conversations, etc.
- Encouraging families to teach service as a way of life through their involvement in helping activities
- Showing parents how to foster the development of moral values in their children
- Establishing a network of care and support for youth and their families

Cross referencing these scales with others reflecting the faith commitments of youth, indicate that close parent-youth bonds, help and support given to families in conflict, and efforts made toward equipping parents of teenagers for navigating adolescence are positively related to vital faith in young people.

Supporting and strengthening families is a ministry of the whole congregation. Families are nurtured through the ministries and the quality relationships in the congregation. This can be seen in the high scores give congregational life in the survey.

Congregational Life Characteristics (9 = highest score)	Parents Rating
Importance of this Church to Me	7.73
Welcoming Atmosphere	6.96
Congregation's Moral Guidance	6.81
Congregation Promotes Service	6.42
Teaches Core Christian Concepts	6.95
Members Experience Love and Support	6.92
Congregation Makes Me Think	6.36
Satisfaction with Worship	6.27
Congregation Open to Change	6.25

Adult Education Effectiveness	5.96
Congregation's Social Interaction	5.18

Parental Involvement in Youth Ministry

The results of the study clearly indicate that parents are supportive of their congregation's effective youth ministries. One of the reasons for this support: they view the congregation's ministry to be a positive force in the lives of their sons and daughters. One church reported that families join the parish because the youth ministry provides a hospitable, substantive environment that is a safe place for their teenagers. These parents appreciate the knowledge of the faith, the values, and the leadership skills they see developed in the youth of the congregation and encourage their sons and daughters to participate.

The partnerships between the congregation and the families of their youth create a working synergy that enables the congregation, its youth ministry, and the families to contribute more to the lives and faith of their young people. In many congregations parents were directly involved in the congregation's youth ministry relationships and activities, serving as leaders/facilitators for Bible study groups, mission trips, retreats, worship, and small groups. Congregations also involve parents in planning processes to shape the direction of youth ministry. Given parents profound influence in the lives of their teens, their involvement in youth ministry is a potential source of growth in faith and life for both teenagers and their parents.

Quality relationships at church had a positive impact on young people's families. Two scales of the survey indicate that building strong relationships at church improved the atmosphere in families. The study revealed that family relationships are strengthened when families were equipped at church: 1) to engage in service activities with their teenage sons and daughters, and 2) when they were equipped for teaching Christian concepts of right and wrong to their adolescents. Parents indicated that they often struggle with the challenges of discussing their values with their children, and are left feeling alone and isolated because of the cultural forces impacting their sons and daughters. Thus they deeply value the support these congregations provided in assisting in passing their values on to their children.

4. Leadership in the Congregation

Leadership of the Pastor

Pastors matter immensely in effective youth ministry! And they matter in very specific ways. Pastors lead through their spiritual influence, their pastoral effectiveness, their love for and support of young people, and their support of youth ministry leaders. In the EYM congregations, pastors are the most influential persons among the many adults and youth sharing leadership in these effective ministries with youth.

Four Faith Assets describe the traits and leadership of the pastor regarding youth and youth ministry within the congregation. Taken together these four Faith Assets describe how influential a pastor's role is in the overall faithfulness and effectiveness of a congregation's ministries with youth.

> **Asset 7. Spiritual Influence:** The pastor knows and models the transforming presence of God in life and ministry.
> **Asset 8. Interpersonal Competence:** The pastor builds a sense of community and relates well with adults and youth.
> **Asset 9. Supports Youth Ministry:** The pastor understands, guides, and advocates for youth ministry.
> **Asset 10. Supports Leaders:** The pastor affirms and mentors youth and adults leading youth ministry.

The Pastor's Spiritual Influence
The pastors witness to their own faith in speech and action does not go unnoticed in their churches. Youth ministers, adult youth workers, parents, and young people identify four ingredients of spiritual influence: 1) their pastor's expression of what they personally believe, 2) their pastor's faith practices, 3) the way their pastor's public ministry was an expression of an authentic faith, and 4) the way their pastor's faith was integrated in their pastor's lifestyle. Furthermore, the pastor's personal faith and its undergirding theology seemed to be one of the critical elements in the faith maturity of the congregation.

Pastors influence young people, and the congregation, in the ways they talk about God, pray, and ask for forgiveness when they hurt someone. Young people report that their pastors have a direct

and profound impact on them spiritually and relationally. They say that the "Pastor's Personal Characteristics" model Christian life in a manner that gives faith integrity and inspires them to be faithful.

Five scales focusing on the pastor's spiritual influence received high scores from youth, parents, and adult youth workers:

Pastor's Spiritual Influence Characteristics (9 = highest score)	Y	P	AL	P & YM
Pastor's Spiritual Influence (pastor's faith, pastoral skills, passion for ministry)	7.37			
Pastor's Personal Characteristics (pastor's personal relational and ministerial skills)	7.13			
Pastor is a Good Counselor		6.82	7.02	
Pastor Preaches to Make Disciples		6.71	6.80	
Pastor's Mission Is to Make Disciples				6.94

[Y=youth, P=parents, AL=adult leaders, P=pastor, Y=youth minister]

The Pastor's Effectiveness

The pastor's effectiveness as a leader has a significant influence on the congregation and youth ministry. Four scales that describe the pastor's leadership role receive high scores from youth, parents, and adult youth workers:

Pastor Effectiveness Characteristic (9 = highest score)	Youth	Parents	Adult Leaders
Pastor's Personal Characteristics (pastor's personal relational and ministerial skills)	7.13		
Effectiveness of Pastor's Leadership		7.88	7.90
Interpersonal Characteristics		7.80	
Pastor's Communication Skills		7.30	7.48

The Pastor's Relational Skills

Pastors build relationships with youth, and they encourage and equip their congregations to do the same. They have a genuine interest in people, especially young people, and possess the capacity to make "heart to heart' connections with people of all ages. The relational ability of the pastor has a direct relationship to the capacity of the congregation to nurture mature levels of faith in youth and adults.

Pastors have great influence in generating a culture in which effective ministry with youth can occur through their authenticity, directness, and compassion in relationships. This in turn cultivates authenticity, directness and compassion throughout the congregation, especially in the congregation's relationships with young people.

Pastor's Relational Skills Characteristics (9 = highest score)	Youth	Parents	Adult Leaders
Pastor's Personal Characteristics (pastor's personal relational and ministerial skills)	7.13		
Interpersonal Characteristics		7.80	
Pastor's Communication Skills		7.30	7.48

The Pastor's Support

Pastors have strong working relationships with their youth ministry leadership team. Pastors support the congregation's youth minister, value the work of adult youth workers, and are involved in the strategic planning of ministries with youth. Pastors also have high levels of support for and commitment to Christian education and youth ministry. Three scales describe the pastor's support:

Pastor Support Characteristics (9 = highest score)	Adult Leaders	Pastor & Youth Minister
Pastor Supports Christian Education and Youth Ministry	8.05	
Pastor Support for Youth Staff		7.76
Pastor Creates a Healthy Climate		7.39

When you combine these four sets of strengths—spiritual influence, leadership, relationships, and support—a composite of powerful influence emerges. The effectiveness of the leadership of the pastor and the attitudes of the pastor regarding young people combine with the pastor's relational wisdom and skill to position pastors among the most influential factors in a congregation's youth ministries.

Leadership of the Youth Minister

Six Faith Assets describe the strengths of the primary youth minister in the congregation. The youth minister is both a competent leader with theological and ministry knowledge and skill, and a faith-filled role model for youth and adults.

Asset 23. Provides Competent Leadership: The youth minister demonstrates superior theological, theoretical, and practical knowledge and skill in leadership.

Asset 24. Models Faith: The youth minister is a role model reflecting a living faith for youth and adults.

Asset 25. Mentors Faith Life: The youth minister assists adult leaders and youth in their faith life both one-on-one and in groups.

Asset 26. Develops Teams: The youth minister reflects a clear vision and attracts gifted youth and adults into leadership.

Asset 27. Knows Youth: The youth minister knows youth and the changes in youth culture, and utilizes these understandings in ministry.

Asset 28. Establishes Effective Relationships: The youth minister enjoys effective relationships with youth, parents, volunteers, and staff.

These Faith Assets are reflected in five significant scales from the survey findings.

Youth Minister Leadership Characteristics (9 = highest score)	Youth	Parents	Adult Leaders
Youth Minister's Positive Characteristics	7.87		
Youth Minister's Leadership		8.14	
Youth Minister's Competence		8.14	7.95
Youth Minister's Effectiveness			7.83
Youth Minister Characteristics			7.24

These scales describe the qualities of the youth minister who possesses: 1) a vitality of faith; 2) a commitment to youth; 3) the capacity to relate well with youth and adults; 4) knowledge of Scripture and the Christian faith; 5) the ability to discover other's gifts and strengths; 6) effectiveness in recruiting, training and supporting adult and youth leadership; 7) the ability to assist a congregation in supporting youth ministry; 8) the capacity to handle conflict; and 9) a commitment to caring for his or her own spiritual, social and physical health.

One of the key elements for effective youth ministry is the relational ability of the youth minister: establishing close relationships with young people, and modeling and fostering significant relationships among young people and adults in the congregation. There are plentiful, positive interaction between adults and youth. As a result youth feel adults in the church understand them. Youth ministers build bridges between the congregation and their young people. Like a bridge that has anchors in two land masses, the youth minister has influence in both the adult and youth worlds. Adults may not grasp their crucial role in influencing youth without someone guiding them in the process. By teaching and modeling for the congregation the importance of building closer bonds with young people, youth ministers can not only set the pace for volunteers and lay a solid foundation for team work with other staff, they can also foster a congregational community that nurtures teenage faith maturity.

One unique feature of the youth ministers in the study is that they all had served in the same congregation for many years, developing connections and networks of influence and leadership. It appears from the research that four factors contribute to the effectiveness and the long terms of youth ministers:

1. A congregation with high expectations "calls" a person of strong faith and passion for ministry with youth.
2. Once that person has been called, the congregation supports them with prayer, resources, ongoing education, and networks of support.
3. The person who has been called thrives in this culture of high expectations, ample resources, ongoing learning and strong support. The youth minister deepens his or her commitment, expands personal investment, and fires the imagination. Full of spirit and hope, the youth minister stays for years even decades.
4. The youth minister's faithfulness and effectiveness inspires the congregation to higher expectations, imagination and support. And forward it goes over long periods of expanding impact in the lives of young people.

Youth and Adult Leadership

A cluster of five Faith Assets describe youth and adult leadership—people of a vibrant and informed Christian faith who are "called" to youth ministry leadership. They are in significant relationships with each other and with the young people of the congregation. They prepare for their ministry through training and apprenticeships in their leadership roles.

Asset 29. Equipped for Peer Ministry: Youth practice friendship, care-giving, and outreach and are supported by ministry training and caring adults.

Asset 30. Establish Adult-Youth Mentoring: Adults engage youth in the Christian faith and life supported by informed leadership.

Asset 31. Participate in Training: Youth and adults are equipped for ministry in an atmosphere of high expectations.

Asset 32. Possesses Vibrant Faith: Youth and adult leaders possess and practice a vital and informed Christian faith.

Asset 33. Provides Competent Adult Leaders: Adults foster authentic relationships and utilize effective practices in youth ministry with a clear vision strengthened by training and support.

Adult Leadership

The adult leaders in youth ministry are women and men of mature faith. They are aware of the presence and activity of a living God in their lives and practicing faith in their daily lives. Adult leaders have a real sense that God is guiding them in daily life. Their thinking is informed by substantive understandings of God as reflected in Scripture and their faith traditions. Moreover, this awareness and understanding of God has a central place in their life's direction, their speaking, and their decision-making, leading them to be more morally responsible and socially conscious. Their faith forms the substance and sets the tone of youth ministry practices. They live their faith both at church and in the community, carrying in their lives manifold indications that God is present in their lives and influential in their decisions.

The faith of adult leaders in youth ministry is reflected in six significant scales from the survey findings:

Faith Characteristics of Adult Leaders (9 = highest score)	Adult Leader Rating
God Consciousness	8.57
Moral Responsibility	8.06
Centrality of Faith	7.47
Theological Competence	6.70
Social Responsibility	6.56
Bible Reading	5.58

Adult leaders form trusted relationships with young people and their parents as evidenced in the high scores from the survey findings:

Relational Characteristics of Adult Leaders (9 = highest score)	Adult Leader Rating
Positive Relationship with Youth	7.07
Youth Workers' Relationship with Parents	6.93

A systematic plan for training adult youth workers is a vitally important part of youth ministry, no matter the size of congregation or the number of leaders. Effective adult youth leaders are the result of intentional efforts at recruiting, training, and encouraging adults with the requisite gifts willing to give of themselves to ministry. There is a strong relationship between effective adult leaders and the training provided in youth ministry as identified in the survey findings:

Training of Adult Leaders (9 = highest score)	Adult Leader Rating
Adult Worker Satisfaction	6.82
Adult Worker's Creativity	6.72
Effectiveness of Training	5.85
Training Emphasis	5.12
Training of Adult Youth Workers	5.52

A distinctive characteristic of the adult leaders in the study is their dedication and long-tenured service. Adult leaders who serve for longer periods of time seem to be an important positive factor in the faith maturity of youth.

Youth Leadership

One of the significant discoveries in the study was the large numbers of young people in leadership. Congregations, large and small, intentionally involve youth in leadership. They develop youth leaders, share real responsibilities, and delegate tasks. They encourage young people in leadership by providing resources and training throughout the life and ministries of their congregations.

Young people lead congregational activities: teaching classes, guiding worship, serving on committees, and helping with programs and events. As a result, these young people mature in their faith, develop important leadership skills, and are drawn more deeply into the life of the congregation. These youth scored significantly higher than their peers on a scale called "Leadership Development Activities" which measures the prevalence of congregational leadership training and the levels of leadership participation by youth. Young people who are apprenticed into leadership are more likely to develop more mature levels of faith. Congregations develop

strategies for discovering and utilizing young people's strengths and spiritual gifts

Youth lead through expressions of faith and servant witness. They speak privately and publically about their faith with others in the congregation. They bring their friends to worship, Bible studies, youth activities, mission trips, retreats, and youth events. Younger youth watch their older peers and learn from their example. Congregations benefit from this witness of young people—young people lead others in the church to greater engagement in ministry.

Young people in the study are given opportunities to exercise their gifts and talents in worship, education, music and service. They are considered as able and gifted as the adults in the congregation. Many congregations utilize Bible studies around spiritual giftedness and gift inventories as a framework for identifying young peoples' gifts and strengths. Identifying these young peoples' gifts and apprenticing them into leadership begins in the early grades and continues through high school.

Youth also lead through relationships with their peers. Many of the churches in the study have embedded a sense of responsibility for mentoring the young into the culture of the congregation. High school youth are apprenticed into leadership by serving as mentors, small group co-leaders, and big brothers and sisters to their younger counterparts.

They often serve as team leaders in their youth ministries. As young people lead youth ministry activities, adults are guiding, mentoring and coaching.

Conclusion

The EYM congregations present a portrait of the strong impact faith communities can have on the faith and lives of young people when churches set their minds to fully enfranchise young people in their life and ministry. When pastors, congregational leaders, parents and adult youth leaders work together to promote real commitment to young people as full members of the body of Christ and carry that commitment across the life and mission of the entire congregation, teenagers mature in faith and grow to respect and love their church. The EYM study demonstrates how age-level youth ministry and ministries with family are dependent upon and greatly enhanced by congregations setting young people and youth ministry as one of its essential priorities. If a congregation is not willing to make this commitment, youth and youth ministry will always be tangential and second rate. Congregational commitment to young people is essential for effective ministry with youth.

For more information about the Exemplary Youth Ministry Project go to www.exemplarym.com. and www.luthersem.edu/exemplary

Exemplary Youth Ministry Webinars
Join us for an online seminar presented by the Center for Children, Youth and Family Ministry at Luther Seminary

Learn the basics about the ground-breaking study of exemplary youth ministries under the leadership of Dr. Roland Martinson of Luther Seminary:
- the key aspects of a mature Christian faith
- the Faith Assets of congregational youth ministry
- the role of leadership in creating a culture for developing mature Christian young people

You will not only learn about the results of the EYM study, but you'll hear stories from leaders within these congregations. You will discover how all congregations can be places where the faith of young people is nurtured to maturity.

Winter 2010 Webinars Schedule
**January 28 ,11 am CST • February 2, 1 pm CST • February 11, 11am CST
Registration is limited to six people per session, so sign up today!
Cost: $45 ($25 for current seminary students)
Three easy ways to register! Online at www.luthersem.edu/exemplary
OR phone at 651.523.1772 OR contact Tom Schwolert at
tschwolert001@luthersem.edu.**

Dates for Spring 2010 are on the way.

Faith Assets™ Assessment Tool

The Faith Assets can provide a common language to involve all members of the congregation in discovering their role in the lives of young people. Use this assessment tool to reflect on the *priority* and *practice* of the 44 Faith Assets in the life of your congregation and youth ministry. The Assessment Tool can be used with church staff, key leadership, and/or leadership councils to conduct an overall assessment of the congregation's impact on young people. It can be used by the youth ministry team, as well church staff and key leaders, to assess the effectiveness of the youth ministry effort. This tool is best used in group settings where there can be discussion and shared analysis. Begin by giving people time to complete the assessment individually. Then, use the following process to share reflections and analysis, and plan for improvement in each of the four asset groupings.

Assessment Process

1. Select your first Faith Asset grouping for analysis: 1) Congregational Faith and Qualities, 2) Youth Ministry Qualities, 3) Family/Household Faith, or 4) Leadership.
2. Develop a profile of current practices and activities for this Faith Asset grouping: *How does our congregation (as a whole community, as youth ministry, and/or as leaders) promote these Faith Assets*?
3. Develop a composite score of the group's assessment of the *priority* of the Faith Assets in this grouping.
4. Discuss the reasons for people's ratings using the following questions: a) *Is this an accurate picture of our congregation's priorities in this asset area?* b) *Why do we believe it is accurate or inaccurate?* c) *Should a particular asset be a higher priority than it currently is?*
5. Develop a composite score of the group's assessment of the *practice* of the Faith Assets in this grouping.
6. Discuss the reasons for people's ratings using the following questions: a) *Is this an accurate rating of our congregation's practices in this asset area?* b)*Why do we believe our rating is accurate or inaccurate?* c) *How does our rating compare with the quality and scope of our specific activities for these Faith Assets? Which assets do we need to develop more fully?*
7. Identify the Faith Assets in this grouping that your congregation needs to make a higher priority and/or develop more effective practices.
8. Plan for improvement to strengthen the Faith Assets that you have identified as important areas for growth: 1) brainstorm potential strategies to develop the Faith Asset, 2) select one or more strategies for action, and 3) develop an action plan with implementation steps, budget, leadership, and dates for completion.

Part 1. Congregational Faith & Qualities

Priority 1=low, 5 = high	Congregational Faith	Practice 1=low, 5=high
1 2 3 4 5	1. **God's Living Presence**: The congregation possesses a sense of God's living presence in community, at worship, through study, and in service.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	2. **Centrality of Faith**: The congregation recognizes and participates in God's sustaining and transforming life and work.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	3. **Emphasizes Prayer**: The congregation practices the presence of God as individuals and community through prayer and worship.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	4. **Focus on Discipleship**: The congregation is committed to knowing and following Jesus Christ.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	5. **Emphasizes Scripture**: The congregation values the authority of Scripture in its life and mission.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	6. **Centrality of Mission**: The congregation consistently witnesses, serves and promotes moral responsibility, and seeks justice.	1 2 3 4 5

Priority 1=low, 5 = high	Congregational Qualities	Practice 1=low, 5=high
1 2 3 4 5	7. **Supports Youth Ministry**: Youth and ministry with young people are high priorities for the congregation.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	8. **Demonstrates Hospitality**: The congregation values and welcomes all people, especially youth.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	9. **Strives for Excellence**: The congregation sets high standards, evaluates, and engages in continuous improvement.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	10. **Encourages Thinking**: The congregation welcomes questions and reflection on faith and life.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	11. **Creates Community**: The congregation reflects high quality personal and group relationships.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	12. **Encourages Support Groups**: The congregation engages members in study, conversation, and prayer about faith in daily life.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	13. **Promotes Worship**: The congregation expands and renews spirit-filled, uplifting worship.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	14. **Fosters Ethical Responsibility**: The congregation encourages individual and social moral responsibility.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	15. **Promotes Service**: The congregation sponsors outreach, service projects, and cultural immersions both locally and globally.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	16. **Demonstrates Effective Practices**: The congregation engages in a wide variety of ministry practices and activities.	1 2 3 4 5
	Youth Involvement in the Congregation	
1 2 3 4 5	17. **Participate in the Congregation**: Youth are engaged in a wide spectrum of congregational relationships and practices.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	18. **Assume Ministry Leadership**: Youth are invited, equipped and affirmed for leadership in congregational activities.	1 2 3 4 5

Part 2. Youth Ministry Qualities

Priority 1=low, 5 = high	Youth Ministry Qualities	Practice 1=low, 5=high
1 2 3 4 5	19. **Establishes a Caring Environment**: Youth Ministry provides multiple nurturing relationships and activities resulting in a welcoming atmosphere of respect, growth, and belonging.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	20. **Develops Quality Relationship**: Youth Ministry develops authentic relationships among youth and adults establishing an environment of presence and life engagement.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	21. **Focus on Jesus Christ**: Youth ministry's mission, practices, and relationships are inspired by the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	22. **Considers Life Issues**: Youth ministry is values and addresses the full range of young people's lives.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	23. **Uses Many Approaches**: Youth ministry intentionally and creatively employs multiple activities appropriate to the ministry's mission and context.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	24. **Organized Well**: Youth ministry engages participants and leaders in long range planning, implementation, evaluation and innovation in an atmosphere of high expectations.	1 2 3 4 5

Part 3. Family / Household Faith

Priority 1=low, 5 = high	Family / Household Faith	Practice 1=low, 5=high
1　2　3　4　5	25. **Possess Strong Parental Faith**: Parents possess and practice a vital and informed faith.	1　2　3　4　5
1　2　3　4　5	26. **Promotes Family Faith Practices**: Parents engage youth and the whole family in conversations, prayer, bible reading, and service that nurture faith and life.	1　2　3　4　5
1　2　3　4　5	27. **Reflects Family Harmony**: Family members' expressions of respect and love create an atmosphere promoting faith.	1　2　3　4　5
1　2　3　4　5	28. **Equips Parents**: The congregation offers instruction and guidance that nurture parental faith and equips parents for nurturing faith at home.	1　2　3　4　5
1　2　3　4　5	29. **Fosters Parent-Youth Relationships**: The congregation offers parent-youth activities that strengthen parent-youth relationships.	1　2　3　4　5

Part 4. Leadership

Priority 1=low, 5 = high	Leadership of the Pastor	Practice 1=low, 5=high
1　2　3　4　5	30. **Spiritual Influence**: The pastor knows and models the transforming presence of God in life and ministry.	1　2　3　4　5
1　2　3　4　5	31. **Interpersonal Competence**: The pastor builds a sense of community and relates well with adults and youth.	1　2　3　4　5
1　2　3　4　5	32. **Supports Youth Ministry**: The pastor understands, guides, and advocates for youth ministry.	1　2　3　4　5
1　2　3　4　5	33. **Supports Leaders**: The pastor affirms and mentors youth and adults leading youth ministry.	1　2　3　4　5
	The Leadership of the Youth Minister	
1　2　3　4　5	34. **Provides Competent Leadership**: The youth minister demonstrates superior theological, theoretical, and practical knowledge and skill in leadership.	1　2　3　4　5
1　2　3　4　5	35. **Models Faith**: The youth minister is a role model reflecting a living faith for youth and adults.	1　2　3　4　5
1　2　3　4　5	36. **Mentors Faith Life**: The youth minister assists adult leaders and youth in their faith life both one-on-one and in groups.	1　2　3　4　5
1　2　3　4　5	37. **Develops Teams**: The youth minister reflects a clear vision and attracts gifted youth and adults into leadership	1　2　3　4　5
1　2　3　4　5	38. **Knows Youth**: The youth minister knows youth and the changes in youth culture and utilizes these understandings in ministry.	1　2　3　4　5
1　2　3　4　5	39. **Establishes Effective Relationships**: The youth minister enjoys effective relationships with youth, parents, volunteers, and staff.	1　2　3　4　5
	Youth and Adult Leadership	
1　2　3　4　5	40. **Equip for Peer Ministry**: Youth practice friendship, care-giving, and outreach supported by training and caring adults.	1　2　3　4　5
1　2　3　4　5	41. **Establish Adult-Youth Mentoring**: Adults engage youth in the Christian faith and life supported by informed leadership.	1　2　3　4　5
1　2　3　4　5	42. **Participate in Training**: Youth and adults are equipped for ministry in an atmosphere of high expectations.	1　2　3　4　5
1　2　3　4　5	43. **Posses Vibrant Faith**: Youth and adult leaders possess and practice a vital and informed faith.	1　2　3　4　5
1　2　3　4　5	44. **Competent Adult Volunteers**: Adults foster authentic relationships and effective practices in youth ministry with a clear vision strengthen by training and support.	1　2　3　4　5