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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1. What do I want to research?

Research shows that the church in North America is failing to retain young people. While a young person may attend a youth program organized by a church, there is often a difficulty in retaining this person as statistics show that the majority fail to stay with the church past high school. The problem I wish to research is

The relationship between young people leaving the church and the Attractional Model (and the closely related Funnel Model) of youth ministry with special focus on Canada. Is the division of evangelism and discipleship, combined with the use of entertainment as the attraction in evangelism, helpful in faith formation and spiritual longevity, or has it contributed to the failure of youth retention in the North American church?

I want to ask the question: “Is there a connection between young people leaving the church in North America and what churches use to attract them to the youth ministry of the church?” In particular, I want to explore the use of entertainment in the Funnel Model of youth ministry as proposed by Duffy Robbins of Grove City College in Pennsylvania. This is a well-known strategy of youth ministry and is a component of what is commonly referred to as “attractional youth ministry”. An attractional youth ministry is one that uses any activity that is perceived to be attractive or enjoyable, as both an entry point for the unchurched and source of retention for those within the church. I will examine whether the features of these entry points to a Christian youth group have contributed to the failures in retention rates of young people in North America with a special focus on the impact in Canada. My research will not be a critique of the whole Funnel Model (there are a number of parts to it) but will examine the initial entry point for the unchurched young person. By understanding the factors that have led us to this crisis point in youth ministry, I will examine how Practical Theology addresses these issues and seek to provide some responses that may help with the retention of young people.

1.1 How did I come to this theme?

In 1992 Mark Senter wrote that youth ministry needs a “revolution” and a “total restructuring,” stating that, “continued modifications of the current system simply will not keep up with the changes in the world in which we live” (Senter 1992:29). Two years earlier, Mike Yaconelli, cofounder of the highly influential publishing and training organization Youth Specialties, sounded an alarm. He wrote,

“I believe we’re in a crisis of youth ministry. And unless we wake up we could well lose this generation. Kids of the 90s aren’t accelerated versions of the 80s, 70s or 60s. They’re different in every way I can think of ... most of our models of parachurch youth ministries were developed in the late 40s, 50s and 60s and are out of touch” (Yaconelli 1990:6).

My involvement in youth ministry has spanned over four decades. As a youth I was a weekly participant at my church’s youth program, following this, I have been involved as a youth leader for

thirty years, both professionally and as a volunteer. I am now teaching youth ministry at a Christian college and seminary in Canada. Early on in my involvement in youth ministry, I became increasingly aware that there was a retention problem with many youth groups around me. The longer I was in youth ministry, the more this awareness increased. The recent *Hemorrhaging Faith* report published in Canada, as well as numerous studies in the United States, have confirmed this. We are in a crisis of youth ministry due to falling numbers and our failure to retain those youth who attend our youth programs. In short, we are failing at producing longevity when it comes to the Christian faith.

In 2004, I had the privilege of becoming the youth director of St. Johns Anglican Church (Shaughnessy) in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. This large, well-known church had, at the time, over 1,400 congregants, however, the youth ministry numbered approximately 25 young people. When I was in the interview process the committee discussed with me a report that had come from a designated task force from within the church on the “pyramid effect” (see Annexure II). This report simply stated that there were less youth in the church as they grew older. There was a thriving children’s ministry of over 100 children, but there were far fewer junior high aged youth, even less in the upper grades of high school. In the young adults group (ages 18-22), there were approximately ten who met each week, with eight of them coming from other churches. I was hired with the mandate to change the youth group and design it in a way that would (hopefully) retain more of the older. The goal was to have a healthy replenishing of the church for years to come.

After spending many months in fact-finding, it was evident that the church’s youth ministry had been a combination of two separate gatherings. One was a discipleship group on Sunday mornings, the other a Friday evening social program built around activities such as playing hockey (for the males) and watching modern films (for the females). It was soon clear that this program was designed with two outcomes in mind: to keep the church youth engaged in church activities through entertainment, and to provide a Friday evening program to attract their unchurched friends. The goal was to run a program that was built on activities deemed to be culturally enjoyable, such as indoor hockey.

It was apparent that this goal was not being met, as it did not keep the youth in church nor did they invite their friends. After three months of discussions with parents, church staff, church elders, and the youth themselves, a change in program was agreed upon. This change was geared towards building spiritual maturity and helping the youth learn spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading and prayer. The success of this group was immediate with numerical growth followed by a flow on effect of youth moving from one group to the next. After five years of ministry, we had reversed the previous pyramid structure and greatly increased the retention rates of those young people who were in our youth ministry.

The theme of this paper comes out of this experience, and seeks to ask a very specific question: “Is there a connection between the failure to produce longevity and the means we have used to attract these young people (those both inside and outside the church) to our youth programs?” In particular, I want to explore the connection between the Attractional Model of youth ministry, and youth discontinuation with the church and ultimately with the Christian faith. More specifically, I want to examine the Come and Grow Level activities of Duffy Robbins’ Funnel and young people leaving the church. I also want to explore the extent that the adoption of entertainment as the general foundation for attractional youth ministry programming has hindered the effectiveness of the church. In establishing these connections, I will then attempt to address the issues I have outlined with potential solutions designed to help the church.

1.2 Where am I Going to Erect My Borders?

While it is my belief that a critique of the Funnel Model itself would be a helpful addition to academia, this paper seeks only to examine the possible link between the activities used in attracting youth and the loss of youth from our churches. In particular, I will examine the impact of the Funnel Model on two different Canadian settings: one, a church in Vancouver, British Columbia, the other a group of young adults from the prairies (Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba). The former group is situated in a highly urban setting (Vancouver) and the latter consists of young adults who come from rural settings and small towns in an agricultural environment. In this study I will pay particular attention to the first levels of Duffy Robbins’ funnel (the Come Level and Grow Level) and the impact and effectiveness of this attractional ministry on both settings.

1.3 What Do I Want to Achieve with This Research?

Wuthnow has stated that the impact of Christians will depend on how the church adapts to “the challenges that lie ahead in the twenty-first century” (Wuthnow 1993:19-20). North American youth ministry must examine the reason for the lack of longevity among its youth and churches need to be equipped with strategies that help them to reverse this present trend. In short, the goal of my research is to shed some light on why this loss is occurring and how to avoid it. In addition, I hope to provide an alternative to attraction through entertainment as the general approach to youth ministry programming.

2. Practical Theology and the Crisis in North American Youth Ministry

In order to proceed it is necessary to present a brief understanding of Practical Theology. Practical Theology is a form of theological enquiry concerning how an individual, or community responds in faithful action to a particular issue, problem, or crisis that is encountered. It seeks to answer the question “what is going on” as well as provide a theologically faithful response in lieu of the complex

practical dynamics of a given situation. Swinton and Mowat note that at its heart, Practical Theology seeks to answer the question: “Is what appears to be going on in this situation what is actually going on?” (Swinton & Mowat 2006:8).

Practical Theology is built on the understanding that our practices and actions in and out of ministry are theory-laden and thus filled with values and norms (Osmer 2001:149). When we encounter a crisis, we must reflect on the actions of those involved and what was actually going on in the situation—the meaning and values being expressed in and through the actions. Therefore, Practical Theology is not a theory-practice-theory process but rather praxis-theory-praxis. It is responsive, inviting reflection and action after the issue or event. For the practical theologian, this recursive process consists of experience, reflection, and questioning followed by renewed action. Ultimately Practical Theology is the search for wise action. This action includes reflecting on our theology and how this influences what we do. Andrew Zirschky describes this process as an “active and intentional entanglement of our theology and our actions.” This is a process of reflection on our actions and what God has revealed to us about his mission in this world (Zirschky 2013). Zirschky describes this as a process where, after experiencing a situation that causes us to question whether our actions were helpful or wise, we form a theory blended together from human knowledge, theory, and theological reflection and thus, can proceed with a way forward. Kenda Dean comments that Practical Theology as the accumulation of wisdom gained through thoughtful reflection on a large number of situations we have faced (Dean 2001:36). This combination of theory, reflection, and action is connected with Robin Lovin urging us to see Practical Theology as an intersection of our theology, our actions, and our contemporary circumstances (Lovin 1992). This intersection then helps us to assess what is happening or has happened and then respond in an effective and theologically suitable way. Both Duncan Forrester and Amy Jacober urge us to see the connection and interaction between our practice and our theology. Forrester calls it a “dialectical interaction” (Forrester 2005:54). Jacober echoes this calling it “a dialogue between what we know about God and how this intersects with our everyday life” (Jacoer 2011:26). This “intersection” is designed to form a unity between our understanding of the Christian faith and how this responds to daily living. Part of this is to be an “equipping” of the saints (Forrester 2005:55). Lovin calls for the driving force of Practical Theology to be a desire for a “comprehensive, integrated understanding of the life of faith in contemporary society” (Lovin 1992).

2.1 Practical Theology as a “Theology of Crisis” Set in a Changing and Unique Cultural Context

Practical Theology has, at its core, its locus in a difficult situation or “crisis”. Heitink calls it a “theory of crisis” stating that its character has always been that of a “crisis discipline” (Heitink 1999:3-4). This crisis is an issue faced by a particular person or community and may be unique within their own cultural context. This situation requires a distinctive and possibly new response rather than a generic response that covers a wide range of social and cultural environments. Dean understands that Practical

Theology as situated in these times of complexity and difficulty, and describes it as “taking place when we’re up to our necks in the particularities of Christian life and ministry” (Dean 2001:31).

Darragh agrees, seeing Practical Theology as beginning with a local situation, as opposed to universal presuppositions, as this local issue will have its own unique context and environment. He posits that it is not helpful to assume that universal solutions based on one’s understanding of the “nature of human beings” is relevant to the researcher’s context (Darragh 2007). Müller also urges us to understand that practical theologians must consider the specific and localized context which must direct our movements (Müller 2013).

An important aspect in responding to this crisis is the understanding of one’s culture and context. This context is almost certainly in flux and therefore provides challenges when responding to a crisis.

Heitink calls us to see that ministry is engaged in a society that is constantly changing and, therefore, living out our theology requires a constant process of reflection and evaluation (Heitink 1999:25). The goal of Practical Theology, therefore, is to provide a “discernable and pragmatic course of faithful action in the face of a challenging and changing environment” (Clark 2008:13). This faithful action is done in light of a person’s or community’s present theological beliefs, which, as Heitink points out, are themselves the result of past reflections on previous events (Heitink 1999:153). The present experience then forces this individual or community to rethink their response as the situation has now changed. This process of reflection and evaluation helps us to comprehend what we experience and then formulate wise responses. Richard Osmer notes that we, by nature, desire to understand the experiences we go through and are “inherently ‘hermeneutical’ beings, engaged in the activity of interpreting and making sense of their experience” (Osmer 2008:21 quotations his).

The goal of Practical Theology is to engage in the process of reconciling Christian truth to our experience—especially in the realm of Christian practice and ministry, therefore, it is not concerned with acquiring a rote set of learned responses to situations or crises, but rather with how we interpret these crises through a lens of Christian faith and how we respond with appropriate action. It is the study of the layered environment in which a particular issue is housed. Root observes that Practical Theology requires not “good performers,” but rather people who can reflect on the “layered meaning” of the various activities involved in ministry (Root 2009:58). These layers can be social, economic, political, psychological, or ecclesiastical.

2.2 A Brief History of Practical Theology

The foundations of Practical Theology appear to be in the Roman Catholic study of Moral Theology (Osmer 1990:218). Root asserts that Practical Theology has its “roots in the modern research university” and cites the seventeenth century theologian Voetius as the first theologian to use the actual phrase “practical theology” (Root 2009:55). Voetius, according to Osmer, broadened the earlier

focus by including the fields of ascetic theology, and ecclesiastical polity, thus focusing Practical Theology on “issues that confronted ministers in their work in the congregations” (Osmer 1990:219). Nel points out that as early as the thirteenth century theologians such as Thomas of Aquinas viewed theology as both theoretical and practical (Nel 2003:69). Root notes that Planck’s encyclopedia of 1795 places Practical Theology in the appendix, being the application of the science of biblical studies, church history, and dogmatics (Root 2009:55). However, there is agreement on the impact of Friedrich Schleiermacher who taught Practical Theology at the University of Berlin in 1821. Root calls Schleiermacher the “father of practical theology” (Root 2014:54) and Heitink names Schleiermacher as the originator of Practical Theology, stating that Schleiermacher “wanted to build a bridge to modern humanity by reflecting on the Christian faith on the basis of the experience of the subject (Heitink 1999:19). Heitink notes that Schleiermacher was the “first modern theologian who took the new era into account as he formulated his theology” (Heitink 1999:23). Ray Anderson points out that it was a disciple of Schleiermacher, C. I. Nitzsch, who defined Practical Theology as the “theory of the church’s practice of Christianity” and this led to a movement toward the social sciences and a “theology in the way in which the church functions” (Anderson 2001:24).

3. The Relationship Between Systematic Theology and Practical Theology

The link between Practical Theology and other various theological disciplines (such as systematic theology), as well as our faith traditions, is a necessary one. In fact, Practical Theology is built on the assumption that “all theology begins and ends in practice” (Dean 2011:15). Dean notes that both “historical and systematic theology are helpful in unpacking a situation theologically, and our faith traditions inevitably equip us with certain doctrinal ‘bookmarks’—theological assumptions that we draw on again and again” (Dean 2001:37 punctuation hers). We must avoid the temptation to see the tension between our actions and theology as an either/or but rather as a partnership. Forrester calls this tension a “dialectical interaction” which must be understood in light of the final coming of the Kingdom” (Forrester 2005:54). He encourages us to see an engagement between truth and ministerial practice, believing that there is a unity between the two. In other words, how do our practices, linked with our theology, prepare people for long-term service in God’s Kingdom?

In addition, we must avoid the temptation to see Practical Theology as merely an application of our theological system. However, our theology is a necessary part of reflection and action when confronted with a crisis. Serene Jones urges the practical theologian to have “strong *theological* standards and norms and she calls us to see that an ‘impractical field’ such as systematics will greatly enrich our practices (Jones 2008:211 punctuation hers). Jones sees a partnership between those who teach theology and the “practical wisdom gleaned from faith-on-the-ground, faith as it unfolds in the lived experience of pastors, congregations and Christians everywhere” (Jones 2008:211). Davis agrees, noting that Practical Theology is built on observing what is going on around us, a questioning

process and then “addressing these questions back to our theology” (Davis 1993:42). Australian theologian Graham Stanton provides a helpful exhortation for the interaction between Practical Theology and disciplines such as systematic theology. He calls for a “reformed practical theology” and presses for a “critical correlation between practice and theology.” He urges us to see that our practices and our theology are both directed by God’s voice (Stanton 2013:20 punctuation his). Stanton does not see Practical Theology as replacing the role of scripture as revelation, but rather it allows practice to “shape and critique our theological conclusions without being left untethered from the objective norm of God’s self-revelation in Scripture” (Stanton 2013:25). Stanton’s conclusions are an encouragement for a joining of youth ministry and Practical Theology:

Practical theology provides a methodology that maintains the interest in practice without sacrificing the challenges of theological rigour. Practical theology therefore presents to the study of youth ministry a helpful methodology within which to explore the practices involved in discipling young people (Stanton 2013:14-15 spelling and punctuation his).

4. Practical Theology and the Social Sciences

As previously stated, Practical Theology relies on an understanding of culture and context. Therefore, connections with the social sciences such as psychology and sociology are important. Jacober details this connection, describing Practical Theology as “neither merely applied theology nor pragmatic application with a prayer. It is, rather, a dialogue between traditional theological approaches, on the one hand, and psychosocial perspectives, on the other, regarding the context we find ourselves in” (Jacoer 2011:19). These social sciences can be key in the formation of action as they connect us to a deeper, and possibly correct, understanding of what is going on. Forrester sees the necessity for a bridge that connects theology with the social sciences. It is, therefore, imperative that we “reflect critically upon, learn from, and endeavor to renew reform and strengthen our Christian practice” through this connection with the social sciences (Forrester 2005:53). As many of the social sciences are constantly unearthing new discoveries, Practical Theology, according to Müller, must have a dynamic and fluid element to it that will enable it to “move eloquently between various fields of study (Müller 2013).

Jones describes how the use of another discipline such as sociology can be helpful when dealing with stress in ministry. She cites clinical studies on “compassion fatigue” that are helpful when discussing ministry in a high-stress environment (in her case she was discussing the Columbine High School shooting in Colorado) (Jones 2008:204). Jones notes that the integration of Practical Theology with systematic theology, “as well as other disciplines,” can give a “more comprehensive sense of how one practically engages the life of faith in the midst of a crisis such as Columbine” (Jones 2008:207).

Finally, Malan Nel raises various questions that must be asked by the practical theologian, urging us to understand what is going on in the world of youth ministry, calling us to explore all sources available to us from social sciences to Scripture. The goal is for us to engage in strategic and theologically credible ways to change reality and lead people to more faithful actions in service of the gospel (Nel 2005:18).

5. Praxis

It is critical to understand that no action is value-free, as the observer or participant brings their own understanding and even biases to any given situation (Ballard & Pritchard 1996:66, Jacober 2011:32-33). This bias, according to Osmer, comes about through a process of personal hermeneutics because all people participate in a system of interpretation, whether it be persons, objects, or events (Osmer 1990:223). Osmer cites Gadamer's hermeneutical experience, in which Gadamer outlines an interpretive activity that allows someone to become aware of their presuppositions and lets them to encounter and learn something new (Osmer 2008:22-23). This "new understanding" can only happen when we are aware of our "preunderstandings" and, in Osmer's words, "be willing to put them at risk in a dialogical encounter with the objects, people, or texts they are interpreting" (Osmer 2008:23). Therefore, it is necessary to reflect deeply on our actions and the presuppositions, motivations, and theology behind them. This process or praxis is necessary for the practical theologian. Praxis, according to Anderson, describes a type of action that is "saturated with *meaning*," and is a "form of action that is value-directed and theory-laden" (Anderson 2001:47 italics his).

The term praxis denotes a wider sense than simply practice or activity, as it is concerned with far more than simply what we do. Rather it is concerned with the values, traditions, and normative behavior involved in this practice or activity (Heitink 1999:9). These underlying forces influence our practice and thus call us to have an interaction between theory and practice. In fact, Anderson wants us to see that, for the Christian community, our praxis is our theology expressed in a tangible way, our actions themselves are theological and thus open to reflection and critique (Anderson 2001:48). Heitink points out that, for the Christian community, praxis is the process where the actions of those inside and outside of the church are inspired by Christian tradition with the goal of salvation for the world (Heitink 1999:151). Heitink further notes that this is accompanied by theory which is a "comprehensive hermeneutical-theological statement that relates the Christian tradition to experience, to the life and actions of modern humans (Heitink 1999:151). Therefore, since our actions are never value-free, our actions must be constantly reflected upon and critiqued (Anderson 2001:48).

6. The Core Tasks of Practical Theology

Practical Theology is built around a number of core tasks. It begins with experience, moves to reflection, and ends in a final responsive action. This response, according to Ballard and Pritchard,

will serve the Christian community in their attempts to serve the world and be a faithful witness in every aspect of life (Ballard & Pritchard 1996:18-19). These tasks must be a constant process due to the fluctuating nature of culture and community life. Stanton outlines the fourfold progression involved in Practical Theology.

Practical theology begins with a descriptive-analytic task in order to give voice to the values and theories implied in praxis. The normative task then engages the insights gained from the descriptive/analytic task with the resources of the Christian tradition in order to discern which formulations of the faith (in both theory and practice) are authentically 'Christian'. Practical theology culminates in a performative task that seeks to embody renewed understanding of God's actions (determined in the first two tasks) in renewed practice (Stanton 2013:14 punctuation and grammar his).

To understand these core tasks, I will briefly examine models set out by a number of theologians from a variety of backgrounds and cultural contexts.

6.1 Emmanuel Lartey

Emmanuel Lartey, of Emory University, outlines a "pastoral cycle" based on a five-step process that begins with experience, moves to situational analysis, then to theological analysis, a situational analysis of one's theology, and finally, response (Lartey 2000:75). Lartey calls for the second stage in the process to be "multi-perspectival rather than inter-disciplinary," as he suggests that one can never completely understand the complexity of all the social sciences that can be brought to bear on the issue. However, he encourages us to bring "selected perspectives from relevant disciplines" into the issues as this may lead to a sharper understanding of what is happening (Lartey 2000:76).

Lartey then suggests a twofold theological analysis. The first is a theological analysis, where we ask: "How has Christian thought approached the issues raised?" and "Is there a prophetic insight which may be brought to bear on the situation?". The next theological step is a personal examination of one's own faith perspective, this may lead to a "more adequate reformulation of Christian doctrine." In the final step of the process, Lartey says that the final response to the problem must be done in community with a view to exploring all the "response options" available (Lartey 2000:76).

6.2 Neil Darragh

Roman Catholic theologian Neil Darragh provides a six-step model and asserts that the starting point must be an understanding of the observer's own bias (Darragh 2007:3-12). This bias, whether political, social, ecclesial, gendered, or educational, will influence their perception, interpretation, and resulting response to the issue that is faced. Darragh then calls for a process of finding a clear understanding of the issue. He states that it is "essential to avoid the problem of vague abstraction," as this will ultimately affect your final practice. This is followed by forming a "pivotal question," which must clearly state the problem, be in line with modern culture, and value Scripture. The next step is a

process of rereading Scripture and tradition in light of the issue. He notes that it is important to examine the whole of Scripture, rather than a few dearly held texts. Leading to a final response, Darragh suggests that the necessary response must be a synthesis of rereading the pivotal question through the lens of contemporary culture, Scripture, and tradition. This may then lead to a response.

6.3 Don Browning and Richard Osmer

Two central figures in the modern understanding of Practical Theology are Don Browning and Richard Osmer. The late Don Browning was the Alexander Campbell Professor Emeritus of Ethics and the Social Sciences in the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. His influence in the advancement of the discipline of Practical theology cannot be overstated.

Browning presses for an understanding of theology as “practical from the very beginning” (Browning 1996:5). For Browning, all practices are theory-laden, filled with theories and meaning behind and within (Browning 1996:6). With this understanding, when a church or community is faced with a crisis, a questioning process must begin. This involves a revisiting of sacred texts and events that have guided the community in the past. Browning uses the term descriptive theology to describe “the theory-laden practices that give rise to the practical questions that generate all theological reflection (Browning 1996:47). A key part of this process is to be hermeneutically informed. The observer must be aware of his or her own presuppositions and must become aware of those of others involved in an episode (Browning 1996:48). Browning follows Gadamer’s hermeneutic and rejects a theory-to-practice model of learning. Instead, he urges a practice-theory-practice model, stating that it “gives the entire theological enterprise a more practical cast” (Browning 1996:39).

Browning understands that the process of Practical Theology is driven by questions that arise from “the problems of life that impede our actions” (Browning 1996:55). When faced with a problem, Browning urges four questions that must drive us in our quest for strategic thinking: How do we understand this concrete situation in which we must act? What should be our praxis in this concrete situation? How do we critically defend the norms of our praxis in this concrete situation? And finally, What means, strategies, and rhetorics should we use in this concrete situation? (Browning 1996:55-56).

Richard Osmer of Princeton University has provided a template that involves four key tasks. These tasks work together as a recursive circle and are built on four questions: “What is going on?” “Why is this going on?” “What ought to be going on?” and finally, “How might we respond?” (Osmer 2008:4). The first question is the descriptive-empirical task, whereby one gathers information designed to help understand patterns and the underlying forces involved in a particular situation. The next question is the interpretive task, whereby the examination of the social sciences and the arts will help to explain

the patterns and cultural forces involved in the issue. Following this is the normative task, in which Osmer encourages the use of theological concepts to guide our responses. Finally, he encourages the pragmatic task, where strategies and courses of action are determined. This response will also contain a process of reflection and revision with all who are involved this situation.

Osmer points out that life is filled with systems that are deeply connected. There are interconnections and a wide “web of natural and social systems” that must be taken into consideration (Osmer 2008:17). In addition, he encourages the use of three categories: episodes, situations, and contexts as they “are a convenient way of differentiating units of time and space that are increasingly comprehensive” (Osmer 2008:11). An episode is simply an event or incident that stems from everyday life and requires reflection. A situation is the larger environment of events, relationships, and circumstances that an episode occurs in. Finally, Osmer points out that situations and episodes are found in a context of interacting and interconnected parts. This context is “open and dynamic” and influenced by “local, national and even international systems” (Osmer 2008:12). For the purposes of this research, I will be following the Practical Theology template of Osmer.

7. Understanding the Crisis

This paper will show that there is agreement among many youth ministry authors and researchers that the church in North American is failing to retain young people. David Kinnaman has stated that we are at a “critical point in the life of the North American church.” He critiques the modern church, pointing out that in our rapidly changing culture the paradigms and assumptions that guide our thinking in youth ministry are “rooted in modern, mechanistic, and mass production paradigms” (Kinnaman 2011:13). I will examine the connection between the attractional youth ministry and these “mass production paradigms”.

In this paper I will adopt what Osmer describes as a descriptive-empirical task. That is, the gathering of information that helps us discern patterns and understand “what is going on” (Osmer 2008:4). I will also engage in what Browning calls “a conversation between this crisis and the normative texts that dictate the church’s behavior” (Browning 1996:6). Youth ministry in North America, and in particular Canada, must carefully dissect this crisis, seeking to understand what precipitated it and the impact of easily accessible entertainment, something that was not available in the early days of youth ministry. In addition, what light do the normative texts shine on this crisis in view of a modern and constantly changing culture? In essence, there is a three-way intersection between the past (what events caused the church to be in this crisis), the present (what has changed about culture that has brought about this crisis), and the normative texts that shape the beliefs and practices of these churches (Scripture).

Solving the crisis will involve a process of theological reflection on our church practices and how

these practices “intersect with the practices of the world” and lead to faithful action that brings redemption (Swinton & Mowat 2006:36). There will be some temptations to avoid as we seek to discover a path toward this faithful action. Ray Anderson has observed that our task here is not to bring in “dislocated theological truths,” but to “examine theological understandings in light of contemporary experience in order that their meaning within God’s redemptive movement in the present can be developed and assessed” (Anderson 2001:24). This is a helpful observation, as the temptation for some, may be to simply cite a Bible verse to “fix” the problem. The crisis is much deeper than a mere problem seeking a quick fix. It is a crisis that will require serious meditation on factors that may include sociology, adolescent development and, almost certainly, the rise in easily accessible entertainment in culture. It is my belief that this last factor (the rise of entertainment) has, in particular, negated the attractiveness of the entry-level activities for most, if not all, Christian youth groups.

7.1 Understanding the Need for Change

Once we understand the crisis, we will need to ask: “What should we be doing as an alternative to the present practices which have brought about the crisis?” This is Osmer’s “normative task,” where we decide what methodology will guide us in the quest to replace the present practice (Osmer 2008:4). This is where a reflection on our praxis will be necessary. As we do this, we will echo Browning’s question: “What should be our praxis in this concrete situation?” (Browning 1996:56-57). Some of the questions I wish to consider in understanding the need for change will be: What factors moved the church to adopt this strategy? Did it work in the past? What factors in culture today have made this entry level to youth ministry unproductive? What do the normative texts of the churches who have used this strategy say, and how do we interpret them in light of our conclusions?

7.2 Designing and Implementing a Plan of Action

It is not enough to merely comprehend the crisis, nor see that it needs to change, the ultimate goal of Practical Theology is to bring about transformation. Heitink calls this a “systematic intervention in reality” (Heitink 1999:102). If many of the writers and thinkers on youth ministry today are correct, the church does need to intervene into its present reality and change the trajectory of youth ministry in North America today. Lartey echoes Heitink, urging us to see that the aims of Practical Theology are a “meaningful, methodologically appropriate and viable form of theological activity which may be personally and socially transformative” (Lartey 2000:77). With this in mind, what may be needed is a degree of theological reflection that causes transformation among churches and brings about change on an individual and a community level.

Browning urges us to see that our thinking must be followed by action (Browning 1996:231).

Therefore, our solutions must not simply be theoretical, but they must also be based in an action plan

that is practical, realistic and theologically sound. Ballard and Pritchard tell us that the practical theologian “strives to be a bridge across a divide; a catalyst stimulating change and renewal” (Ballard & Pritchard 1996:35). If the church is in a crisis, it is imperative that we seek to reverse this trend of decreasing numbers and bring effective change to the factors that are causing this trend.

8. What Kind of Research is This?

In his article, “Practical Theology as part of the landscape of Social Sciences and Humanities - A transversal perspective,” Müller argues that Practical Theology must lean on the social sciences. He supports a transversal rationality in which the theologian is able to move between the fields of theology and social sciences in a way that neither prioritizes a universal truth (universal rationality), nor dismisses fundamental truth (diverse rationality). The end result being that Practical Theology is able to discover a focal point in which interdisciplinary engagement is possible (Müller 2007). The critical factor in this engagement is that we must not simply rest on a theological understanding of the crisis, but rather our theology must intersect with what is going on in our culture and how we can achieve our goal of long-term discipleship within this very culture.

The positioning of Practical Theology among the social sciences, with a focus on empirical methodology (qualitative and quantitative research), places a priority on the experience of individuals in real life, specific, and concrete situations with specifically identifiable problems. With this in mind, I will conduct qualitative research with the aim of assessing the activities used to attract youth to church youth groups. I will focus on the Come Level and the Grow Level of the funnel, as well as with the use of entertainment in general in attractional youth ministry. I will also attempt to identify and address certain theological influences that have provided the context of the specific situation (e.g. the seeker sensitive movement).

My research will be a case study of a church that was negatively impacted by a commitment to attractional youth ministry and in lieu of this operated a youth ministry that was built on a division of evangelism and discipleship. In essence, a splitting of mission and identity. In addition, I will interview a number of students from a college in the central west part of Canada. The goal will be to understand their experience of youth ministry and the impact of not only entertainment in evangelism, which is a major aspect to Duffy Robbin’s Funnel Model, but also its impact on retention rates. In other words, is what was used to attract young people helpful or unhelpful in keeping them in long-term church membership?

The case study I wish to use is that of a Canadian church that was heavily influenced by the attractional model. The result of several years of using this model was that the church faced the continual problem of youth leaving the church. The ongoing failure of the youth ministry in this

church sparked the development of a task force that researched the issues and created the 2002 report previously referred to in this paper. Shortly after this report, I was employed with the express purpose of solving the problems addressed in the report and creating a ministry that better enabled youth to continue in their church involvement. From 2004-2009 I directed the youth ministry in a new direction that had significant results in reversing the trends that had characterized the youth ministry. The case study will include: documents and interviews of those involved in the committee previous to my employment; documentation and interviews by those who were involved in the process change from 2004-2009 and interviews of those currently involved in the youth ministry.

The evidence collected will take into account the six sources of evidence as outlined by Yin (Yin 1987:79-89): documentation; archival records; interviews; direct observation; participant observation; physical artifacts. The source of evidence described as “direct observation” will be retrospective and draw on my personal experience of intimate involvement in the ministry and lives of individuals during the period of change (2004-2009). This study will reflect Osmer’s call to “provide a richly textured picture of the case” (Osmer 2008:51). In addition to this I will engage in a qualitative survey of a number of young adults attending a Christian college in Saskatchewan. My goal is to research their experience of the funnel and to compare and contrast this with my experience in Vancouver.

CHAPTER 2 WHAT SHOULD EFFECTIVE YOUTH MINISTRY LOOK LIKE?

1. Introduction

Several decades ago Robert Wuthnow challenged the modern church about the crisis of losing youth, stating that “unless churches continue to draw in young people, give them primary experiences of the faith, and support families in their efforts to train children, the churches can count on significant shrinkage in their members and contributors” (Wuthnow 1996:79). This claim rings true today given statistics on the loss of young people from the church in North America.

To address this crisis, the church must examine its practice and theology. Stated simply, the North American church must relearn how to help young people to reach maturity in their Christian faith. Following this, the church must organize a program that enables these same young people to reach out to those who are not associated with a church or the Christian faith. In addition, we must discern how to foster longevity among all who associate with youth group or church. Young disciples and new converts must have every opportunity for a smooth transition into the life of the church for long-term membership and effectiveness within the church.

Dave Urbanski summarized how many inside, and outside of the church, viewed youth ministry: “hang out with the kids, order pizza, play some games, sing some songs etc. etc.” (Urbanski 2000:1). This was not an endorsement from Urbanski, rather, it was his commentary on how youth ministry is often perceived. In my experience, there is a general belief that youth group is a place of play followed by a small amount of spiritual substance with a primary focus on reaching the lost. One of the core tasks that Osmer encourages in Practical Theology is the normative task, where, in the face of a crisis, we ask, “what ought to be going on?” This encourages us to look to the preferred practice in youth ministry in North America. Browning also advocates questioning in the face of a crisis. There is to be a process of understanding the practices that may have precipitated this crisis, and in addition, he encourages a community to “reexamine the sacred texts and events that constitute the source of the norms and ideals that guide its practices.” This reexamination will include a “conversation,” bringing questions to these sacred texts (Browning 1996:6). As culture and society advance, both the questions and the eventual practice will change as well. Kenda Creasy Dean also urges us to engage in a process of questioning youth ministry. In view of modern youth ministry trends, she asks: “Do existing ‘models and practices’ of youth ministry reflect the church’s best theological work?” (Dean et al 2010b:8).

I want to join in the questioning process and ask: What should characterize modern youth ministry? And, in addition, ask: Are the pictures presented to us by veteran youth leaders such as Urbanski a

healthy picture of what should qualify as good practice in youth ministry today? Along with these questions is one that stems from the normative task: What should we be doing to provide effective youth ministry to reverse the present crisis? In seeking to find an answer to “what should be going on”, Osmer suggests a threefold process: theological interpretation, ethical reflection, and finally, good practice (Osmer 2008:161). The goal of theological reflection is to be observant of our culture and social context with its previously cited episodes, situations, and contexts (Osmer 2008:4). As we engage in theological interpretation, we must strive to understand the deep connection of relationships and systems (Osmer 2008:17). Following this theological interpretation is the engagement in ethical reflection, which needs to provide guidance in determining what goals and outcomes ought to be pursued (Osmer 2008:152). Finally, we are to examine good practice, as this will help us to “imagine how we might do things better or differently” (Osmer 2008:152). This threefold process will be instrumental in setting a course for deciding what should be happening in youth ministry in North America.

It is my belief that it is necessary to examine and explore the relationship between discipleship and evangelism. In this paper, I will examine the common strategy of either placing a priority on evangelism to the detriment of discipleship, or, a division between who we are (our identity) and evangelism (our mission). Nel’s work on identity and mission (2015) will provide a point of focus for this part of the chapter. As I do this, I use Osmer’s threefold process to critique youth ministry through a theological lens. This will highlight the blind spots of ethical reflection and good practice in youth ministry which I believe have resulted in the current crisis. I will comment specifically on ethical reflection and good practice at the close of this chapter, however, much of this will be woven throughout. I believe that youth ministry has overemphasized or neglected each of the threefold steps at various points with unsuccessful results. Using theology as the starting point, I will rely on the interdependence between theology, ethical reflection, and good practice, noting that both ethical reflection and good practice must stem from our theology.

2. Theological Interpretation

2.1 The Lack of Theological Interpretation in Youth Ministry

There is a consensus among many youth ministry strategists that there is a lack of deep theological thought in youth ministry. Chap Clark’s words are noteworthy:

In my experience training youth ministry practitioners, both in the classroom and on the field, the intentional exegetical application of Scripture to ministry and consequential action has been weak to absent. Regardless of the theological starting point, I have encountered few professionally or academically trained youth ministry practitioners whose work directly reflects a careful and deliberative commitment to sound theological method of discernment. Even when some possess a fairly sophisticated biblical or theological acumen, in my experience it is somewhat rare that “well trained” youth ministry professionals are able to connect the dots between their theology and their practice (Clark 2008:30).

Senter is also critical, citing the parachurch's lack of deliberation and claiming that theological reflection is weak in parachurch ministries and in their youth ministry training events. He believes that while seminaries and Christian colleges have provided theological training, many of these ministries are "results-oriented" and stress conversion numbers, rather than pursuing Christian spirituality, Christian community, and bringing the gospel to at risk youth (Senter 2010b:3). Mike King also cites the lack of theological thinking in North American youth ministry, claiming that the church has been "negatively impacted by underdeveloped theology and praxis for passing the faith from one generation to the next" (King 2006:30). Michael Severe offers a sharp critique of modern thinking when it comes to philosophy and praxis in youth ministry. In a 2003 qualitative survey of 19 church-based youth ministers, he concluded that most of these youth leaders had ministries that seemed to operate "without clear philosophies or purpose" (Severe 2006:76). In fact, he claims that many of the strategies in place for these youth ministers had "turned against their purpose" and "become monsters ... destroying the joy of ministry and even the spiritual impact of the youth minister" (Severe 2006:77). Severe believes that many of the respondents did not appear to be adept at discussing ministry philosophy and that their responses were "scrambled, inarticulate and disconnected" (Severe 2006:85). It is interesting to note that after studying the survey, he concluded that there is a need to "establish a clear, direct and intentional connection between theological beliefs, contextual situations, and the goals and vision of ministry" (Severe 2006:77). Severe does not provide any answers to what his survey uncovered, rather, he believes that more research is necessary to understand why youth ministry programs can become unproductive (Severe 2006:77).

There is much to be done in our theological reflection on youth ministry. In my experience, Chap Clark is correct when he asserts that there is a "lack of application of Scripture to ministry and consequential action" associated with this (Clark 2008:30). Youth ministry, at its core, is often operated by pragmatists who are seeking numerical results rather than theological or spiritual results. Robert Webber commented in an online interview that Christianity in the United States had become a "big business" (Homileticonline.com. 2018). Big business is often concerned with selling a product or providing a service to the widest audience possible. It could be argued that this desire to reach a wide audience "closed the door" to deep theological thought (and the associated "consequential action" that Clark calls for) and opened the door for a model of ministry that promises to reach a wider audience (the Attractional Model of ministry). Nel believes that churches have often looked to pragmatism instead of seeking the "rediscovery of true identity" and have uncritically accepted a "whatever works" understanding of the church (Nel 2015:50).

Nel provides a helpful corrective in regard to the lack of theological reflection in youth ministry, calling us to see that "we do what we do because of a theology" that provides a structure (whether

good or bad) and this theology “is always there” (Nel 2005:10). Furthermore, Nel points out that serious Biblical reflection is necessary if we want to develop the body of Christ. He believes that those in ministry ought to have the ability to reflect deeply on this ministry, with regard to “knowledge, insight, competency and attitude as to what we do, why we do it, how we do it, and with what attitude we do what we do” (Nel 2005:17). This will equip those in ministry to equip the people of God for service in this world (Nel 2005:15). Finally, Nel is helpful in urging youth ministry practitioners to see that thinking theologically will help shape our identity, and how we perceive ourselves as the body of Christ under the headship of Jesus (Nel 2005:18).

Practical Theology exhorts us to understand how our theology (or lack of) is operating within our culture. Browning encourages us to interpret our actions theologically in light of our effectiveness in our culture. He calls a community to measure their “isness”—that is: are we living out what we should be (Browning 1996:112)? To connect this to youth ministry in North America: are we conforming to the ideals as set out in Scripture as we understand them? What exactly is the “isness” of youth ministry today? What should it be?

2.2 Thinking Theologically About Youth Ministry

In seeking to answer Browning’s question of what our “isness” should be, there are a number of youth ministry theologians offering possibilities. 2011 saw the publication of Kenda Creasy Dean and Andy Root’s *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, which ushered in a call for youth ministers to think theologically. Soon after, Pete Ward noted that “theology is in” and called for a return to theology in order to develop youth ministry in a “healthy and creative way.” Ward believes that, if we can do this, we will be able to make connections between God and life. This will then connect the message of the gospel to our culture and by doing so, reshape church to “engage with people where they are at” (Ward 2011:69-70). A year before the publication of *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, Kenda Dean wrote that she believes youth ministry is moving into a more “theologically intentional understanding of God and the church” that will deeply shape the future of youth ministry (Dean 2010b:15). In addition, she noted even earlier that youth ministry must be considered as a theological endeavor in which God breaks through our own limitations (Dean & Foster 2004:56-57).

One does not have to look far to find a stated view of what should be happening in youth ministry in North America today. Richard Dunn offers a simple theological framework for youth ministry, stating that it is made up of six basic theological building blocks: God, Scripture, humanity, sin, salvation, and the faith community of the church (Dunn 1997b:51). Wesley Black views youth ministry as a specialized ministry designed for the preparation of adolescents within the life of the church as leaders, disciples, or evangelists. He sees youth ministry as a “laboratory” in which disciples, with the aid of a spiritual coach, can grow (Black 2001:40). Black views the church as a group that must

involve teens in all functions of church life. He lists the central components, including worship, evangelism, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and missions (Black 2001:55). Chap Clark sees youth ministry with a missional, evangelistic lens. He notes that youth ministry has grown from a missional endeavor, and, given that fact that adolescents are a definable culture and a phase of life, the church must seek to reach them via youth ministry (Clark 2001b:80). He notes that the principles that are used for any cross-cultural endeavor must be applied to youth ministry. With this in mind, Clark supports a philosophy of ministry that seeks to engage the unchurched “where they are at,” and a program to attract them via something that *they* are interested in, even if the church or youth group is not. Recently, it appears that some of Clark’s views have shifted. He is now proposing a model he calls “Adoptive Youth Ministry” that seeks, in his words:

A theologically grounded and biblically-driven framework to guide youth ministry leaders, thinkers, writers, teachers, influencers and practitioners to both build the necessary relationships within the church that young people need and intuitively crave, and to help youth ministry locate its biblical and theological grounding within the context of living together as God’s household (Clark 2016b:22).

In examining the development of youth ministry, particularly as it relates to the Attractional Model, it is my belief that in the 1930s and 1940s youth ministry was founded on the understanding that evangelism was priority number one (I will argue this in the following chapter as we examine the ministries of Young Life, Youth for Christ, and Youth Specialties). This was the formation of the Attractional Model that characterizes much of youth ministry today. It is my belief that we now face a situation where modern youth ministry has developed a theology retrospectively as a validation of these initial, and now long-term practices. This has created a situation where theological interpretations were developed as a justification of practice rather than allowing theology and modern culture to shape and re-shape practice.

In his call for theological interpretation, Osmer urges us to see a partnership between “divine disclosure” (God’s word) and our own “shaping of this word.” This prophetic discernment is needed to critique our inherited theologies and also to interpret the vagaries of the culture we are operating in (Osmer 2008:134-135). This concept of examining our inherited theologies as we apply them to our ethics and practice will allow us to continue to apply scripture to our cultural contexts without losing our way to our theological or ideological biases. With this, Osmer encourages a constant questioning of our own theological interpretations and how they are operating—successfully or unsuccessfully in our culture.

2.2.3 The Youth Ministry Theology of Kenda Creasy Dean

Dean has written widely on the state of youth ministry in North America, and what correctives should be put in place. While this paper will be examining her theology of youth ministry more closely in

later pages, it will be helpful to briefly outline her theological interpretation of what is happening and what should be happening instead.

Dean is well known for concentrating on the desire of young people to have a passionate encounter with something bigger and more important than themselves. It is her view that “the adolescent brain is wired for passion; young people feel it in their bones, proclaim it in their hopes and their hormones, act out its power and herald its promise for the imprecise arena of human life” (Dean 2004:6). She is critical of any simplistic treatment of young people’s desire for a meaningful relationship with God. She states that any “Jesus-the-friendly-ghost theology that springs from the interpersonal needs of adolescents themselves,” rather than from Scripture will be ineffective, especially given adolescents’ ability to deal with a “complex rendering” of God (Dean 2004:105). It is her belief that modern youth, who are exposed to enormous amounts of information, advertising, and technology, are more attracted to the presence of God in a gathering of worship than in an atmosphere of play (Dean 2004:215). She notes that youth ministries who place a high premium on entertainment and a low value on spiritual depth, “lacked wonder-producing, faith-provoking, life-altering acts of witness that engaged young people in mission in their own right” (Dean 2004:148). Youth ministry must, therefore, promote a commitment to Jesus that is a “life and death investment” otherwise, youth will direct their passion away from Christianity (Dean 2004:6). She believes that modern youth ministry has removed this passion, and replaced it with something that is tame, and, in the end, ineffective for reaching and keeping youth in the church. She writes:

Contemporary young people will not be “faked out” by a flannel-board Jesus and a flock of felt sheep. Even in a media culture that reduces awe to special effects, youth still seek the glory of the *mysterium tremendum*, a sense of the “numinous” that confirms their intuition that “the truth is out there” – and it’s enormous. Young people look to the church for the high poles of passion that support a canopy of significance that will rise above the storm. But weaving this canopy requires durable fibers: practices that bear witness to the mystery of God, the proclamation of a God who is big enough, holy enough, awesome enough to reach out while at the same time ... being intimate enough to reach in (Dean 2004:115).

Dean is strong in her challenge for a youth ministry that promotes holiness, love, maturity, and a community that offers a clear witness to Jesus (Dean & Foster 2004:51).

With Dean’s challenge in mind, one of the failures in North American youth ministry is the failure to build. That is, there has been a lack of focus on constructing a program that promotes spiritual maturity and longevity among those who attend. I believe this is due to the prioritization of evangelism over other practices. The next chapter will examine why this is so and what has led to the adoption of this methodology.

2.2.4 The Unnecessary Dichotomy of Evangelism and Discipleship

When surveying youth ministry literature, it is my belief that most, if not all, writers put evangelism at the top of the youth ministry “to do” list. There are numerous examples of this. A promotional calendar by Youth for Christ Saskatoon (Saskatchewan, Canada) places “Large Group Focus” as their first youth ministry strategy (Saskatoon Youth for Christ, undated). This is done through events such as “Gymbblast” where they play games in a school gymnasium. It is described as “Saskatchewan’s most explosive school assembly program.” There is also a spring break trip to Southern California where “Students not connected to church or a faith community build relationships with staff and discover what a relationship with God means.” Discipleship is further down the stated list of goals and strategy (Saskatoon Youth for Christ: undated). Clark also separates evangelism from discipleship in his multilevel strategy for “adoptive youth ministry” where Outreach is first, followed by the Welcome level (Clark 2016:19). The bottom level is the Faith Community, where, while Clark does not describe their practices, it appears as if the Christian disciplines that would typically characterize discipleship, are ascribed and assumed. Yaconelli and Burns also promote a youth ministry pyramid that begins with a “Come and See Level” where the only commitment kids have is to come to a youth group event. This is the part of your program that is geared to those kids who “will only come if something is going on that they like” (Yaconelli & Burns 1986:114-115).

It is not unusual or even unexpected that evangelism sits at the top of many youth leader’s agenda as most, if not all, are concerned with the eternal state of young people in their community and beyond. However, there appears to be a shift in recent times, as some are now seeing that the emphasis on evangelism has decreased our effectiveness in helping youth attain spiritual maturity. Some are even questioning the priority of evangelism over discipleship. David Olshine, of Columbia University, has recently stated that it is better if discipleship precedes evangelism in youth ministry (Olshine 2013:65). Canadian Matt Wilkinson, the director of youth ministries for the Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec, agrees, stating: “It is becoming clear that youth workers need to be supported in creating teachings that equip and empower youth themselves to personally share their faith with their friends and visibly live it out” (Wilkinson 2012:71). Mark Oestreicher, the former head of Youth Specialties, appears to agree, claiming that modern youth ministry must place nourishment of the soul as priority number one for youth workers (Oestreicher 2008:114). Rick Lawrence, the influential editor of *Group Magazine*, has stated that “the work of evangelism looks a whole lot like the work of discipleship—we come alongside kids to invite them into our own intimate relationship with God, teach them the truth about Jesus and the Kingdom of God, and then test their understanding by plunging them into experiences and responsibilities” (Lawrence 2007:98). I find his comments interesting and insightful given *Group Magazine*’s past emphasis on the need for entertainment in youth ministry.

Now that there appears to be a growing awareness of the need for some change or evaluation of the priority of evangelism, I want to ask the question: Is it helpful to see an inherent division between a program that builds strong Christians (edification) and one that seeks to reach the unchurched (evangelism)? In particular, the question, “Must we separate the two?” is key. This separation appears to be a common strategy. Many groups even program for it with different nights given over to a different outcome (i.e. Wednesday is a night for Christians to come together and study the Bible, whereas Friday night is a time to run a program to reach the unchurched). There are theological questions that must be asked of modern youth ministry such as: What is the relationship between evangelism and discipleship? and, Is it possible to run one program that does both? I also want to keep Browning’s exhortation to reflect on our “isness.” Does a division between discipleship and evangelism truly reflect who we are and an effective methodology in light of modern society? It is my belief that not enough thought has gone into the relationship between discipleship or edification and evangelism. Must it be an either/or? Finally, it is important that youth ministry focuses its resources carefully, especially given the crisis it is going through.

In the New Testament, it does not appear that evangelism is exclusively separated from building those who are in the church. In other words, we are not encouraged to have, nor do we see a model of two different groups—one for believers and one for unbelievers. While there is often a clear going out to bring the gospel message to those outside of the church, there does not appear to be another group that focuses on bringing in the unchurched separated from the main body. Nel, translating the work of New Testament scholar Van Aarde, offers helpful insights into Jesus’ call to make disciples (Nel 2015:5-6). Van Aarde urges us to see Matthew 28:19 in light of Matthew 5:3 (“Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven”). God has graciously brought outsiders in to his kingdom despite their poverty. Van Aarde calls us to see that this must shape how we view those outside of the church—those inside of the church must remember that we are a “heathen church” and a “tax collector church,” and we must have a great desire to see those outside come inside of the church. Van Aarde believes that the Great Commission is built on two pillars; we live by grace alone as we are unable to enter without God’s gracious action and, we must see ourselves as living in the world but not as a part of it, the world must never become our good news. To do this, Van Aarde calls us to see this Great Commission as the “*manifesto* of Jesus which must be at the centre of a disciple’s life where there is a “dying of the old dispensation” and the “dawn of a radically new one”. Van Aarde summarizes it as fulfilling the two great commandments of loving God and loving our neighbour (Nel 2015:5).

Blomberg offers a somewhat similar position, noting that the call from Jesus to make disciples in Matthew 28:19 (the Great Commission) is not merely about proclamation, but rather, there is a twofold result in reaching out and also building up. He states:

The verb “make disciples” also commands a kind of evangelism that does not stop after someone makes a profession of faith. The truly subordinate participles in v. 19 explain what making disciples involves: “baptizing” them and “teaching” them obedience to all of Jesus’ commandments. The first of these will be a once-for-all, decisive initiation into Christian community. The second proves a perennially incomplete, life-long task” (Blomberg 1992:431).

Here Blomberg is pointing out the inherent connection between Jesus’ call for discipleship. It is the call to come to him, for the first time, and the call to grow in your knowledge and relationship to him, seen here in obedience. This is reflected in other texts in the New Testament, such as Ephesians 4:11-13, where the evangelism of the unchurched does not appear to be separated from building those who are in the church. O’Brien states that “The building of the body is inextricably linked with his intention of filling the universe with his rule, since the church is his instrument in carrying out his purposes for the cosmos.” (O’Brien 1999:297). He notes that building has both an “extensive and an intensive dimension to it” (O’Brien 1999:305). In other words, the Apostle Paul’s use of building here carries the idea of numerical growth as well as spiritual growth. Nel agrees, adding that there is “no justification for preferring one over the other” (Nel 2015:20) and he proposes that we see building up the local church as a dual process of “consolidation and mission” where building not only takes care of the “bricks in the wall” but also adds new bricks as well (Nel 2002:67). This is a helpful observation where successful ministry is seen to have a double action of simultaneously building and reaching.

With this in mind, successful youth ministry must understand the balance and connection between evangelism and discipleship. Nel, commenting on Ephesians 4, points out that Paul highlights how God uses people in the building process. In fact, according to Nel, the members of the congregation, the “joints of the body under the headship of Christ,” must be trained and equipped to do ministry. As this happens, the body grows (Nel 2015:16). It is crucial, according to Nel, that these “joints” are trained to participate in the ministry of the body so they will be prepared for participation in God’s work in the world as God expects them to (Nel 2015:17). However, the belief that successful youth ministry cannot combine discipleship (edification) with outreach (evangelism) is implicit in the writings of modern youth ministry. This assumption needs to be challenged. In addition, successful youth ministry must build—both upwards and outwards. The goal is discipleship that equips and inspires evangelism, and evangelism that equips youth for discipleship and longevity.

3. Identity and Mission: Malan Nel and North American Youth Ministry

3.1 Identity and Mission

At the heart of our understanding of youth ministry must be a theological reflection built around two questions of identity (Who are we?) and mission (What is our task?). As we will see in the next chapter, youth ministry has historically separated these two when it comes to programming. On one

hand, the typical youth program regards itself as a Christian group typified by following Jesus and those qualities that would typically be seen to be “Christian” (e.g. faith, love, hope). In addition, it hopes to produce spiritual maturity through disciplines such as prayer and Bible study, as this is their desired identity. However, what has often consumed these groups is their desire to grow numerically—their mission. As we move to examine Attractional programming, and, in particular, the Funnel model, we will see a disturbing trend in which mission is divorced from identity, employing methods of reaching the lost that do not reflect our identity as the body of Christ on earth. Many groups have struggled to move beyond their mission—from the evangelistic desire to reach the unchurched to a development of their identity, that is, a Christian youth group characterized by the mores and practices of the Kingdom of God. In other words, the mission of reaching the lost has “won out” over identity (spiritual maturity). In addition, these two prongs of identity and mission have led to a dichotomy of programming that is clearly seen in Attractional youth groups and the commonly used Funnel of youth ministry. An example of this is in the common program here in Canada when one night is devoted to evangelism (reaching the lost) and a separate gathering is devoted to edification (building the found).

It is my belief that this failure to understand the relationship between our identity and mission has led to the decline in youth ministry. Nel has written extensively on mission and identity, and it is his belief that this splitting of identity and mission is the very cause of many crises in church ministry. He notes that the church has often struggled with balancing two concerns of “preservation” and “propagation” (Nel 2015:116) and believes that the church must rediscover its God-given identity and purpose in order to recover from a decline in numbers and recover spiritual health (Nel 2015:88). While he is concerned with the church in general, his words directly apply to the crisis of North American youth ministry and an examination of his thesis is a necessary addition in the search for a practical solution.

3.2 Nel’s Call for Reformation

Nel calls for a reformation in the church and in its thinking about its mission, identity, and how the relationship between the two must impact the way the it operates in this world. This reformation must be grounded in our theology and it is about rethinking, Biblically and contextually, who we are and how faithful we are to our calling (Nel 2017:5). He urges the church to “go back” to recapturing an understanding of the church as a creation of the Triune God and what it means to be “in Christ” (Nel 2015:26). His call is for the “return of new life,” and, while change could be painful, it is a necessary process (Nel 2015:35). In addition, Nel calls us to see that the reformation of the congregation must be linked with that of the individual members who make up this congregation (Nel 2015:72). He notes that, while this is a common separation, we must see the renewal of congregation and the individual who make up this congregation as closely linked, akin to “inhaling and exhaling (Nel 2015:73). A key aspect in this reformation process is the understanding of who we are and the connection between

what we do and how we do it. He describes the local church as a place where “the Triune God is at work” and the congregation is being led to operate missionally (Nel 2009c:1). The church has been created through a gracious act of the Triune Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In Nel’s words, “we are because God is” and our very nature is missional (Nel 2018:23). Here Grenz and Nel are in agreement, with Grenz stating that our identity is “led by the Spirit” and “participates together in the fellowship of the Triune God”. This identity, Grenz says, is the foundation for our ministry in the world (Grenz 1998:217).

Nel desires that we see our identity as the body of Christ, and, in light of this, we must participate in what God is doing. It is our identity to be missionally joined with the living God who is himself, missional. Nel stresses that the work of the church must always be understood as a reflection of the Triune God. One aspect of this is that, since Christ came to serve, the church must follow and reflect this through service, and when the church serves in the way that the Christ served, this must be seen as evidence that the Holy Spirit is at work in the congregation (Nel 2015:118).

Nel encourages us to see that God is the great “builder” of the church and does this through equipping members of the church who are then going to build (Nel 2015:13-16). God also enables the congregation for the tasks of ministry through his “refreshing, reforming and renewing” (Nel 2015:72). This is done through a number of processes: there is a hermeneutical dimension in which we grasp the reason for our existence. There is an agological-teleological dimension where there is a set of goals and a plan in place that allow for a means of evaluation. Finally there is a morphological dimension, where structures are developed that will help the congregation towards a life of service and glorification to God (Nel 2015:87). Nel notes that this building of the church always implies growth, both in quality and, “when God pleases, in quantity” (Nel 2015:20).

3.3 *Kerugma, Leiturgia, Koinonia, and Diakonia*

Nel sees the church’s role as glorifying the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit through the communication of the gospel and acts that serve this gospel. It is the church’s responsibility to make sure that all of its ministries serve the gospel and are a communicative act (Nel 2015:70). He cites a list of seven separate “modes of ministry”: preaching (*kerugma*), worship (*leitourgia*), care (*paraclesis*), community (*koinonia*) teaching (*didache*), service (*diakonia*) and witness (*marturia*). In addition to this, he adds the category of leading (*kubernesis*). He instructs the church to see them as an integrated whole. The “balanced diet” of every congregation is a synthesis of these modes that must be taken seriously in the communication of the gospel. This requires active integration and coordination of these various ministries (Nel 2015:71). It is important, Nel says, to see that while there is a distinctiveness among these ministries, they are also interwoven and deeply connected (Nel 2018:227).

A key aspect to Nel's theology is the fact that the ministries of the church, while distinct from each other, must work together. He describes the relationship as being similar to "plaiting," which forms a "whole and beautiful unity." Each is connected and needs the other to function well. Nel proposes a circular picture of these eight ministries. They are connected and operate to further the "communication of the gospel in service of God, one another, and the world" (Nel 2015:78). In doing so, he demonstrates their interdependence and connection without prioritizing one over another.

3.4 Evangelism and Numerical Growth

The church, according to Nel, must be committed to seeking those who do not attend the local gathering. This means that the true identity of the church is to be missional—if it is not, "it is no church at all" (Nel 2015:12). Through this local congregation, God comes to the world to be known, loved, and served. The goal to reach the lost must be foundational to the life of the church and is the reason why the church exists. Nel sees the local congregation as an instrumental part of fulfilling God's plan for unfolding the Kingdom of God in a direct way. He describes the church as "God's search parties," and an "expression of God's love for the world" (Nel 2015:38). In fact, Nel believes that being a member of a congregation requires service that is rooted in the redemption of Christ (Nel 2015:121). It is too simplistic, he says, to use phrases like "we must do evangelism," or, "we need another evangelistic event." Rather, the very nature of the church is to grow, since it is our identity to reach out to those not in the church. The removal of the division between identity and mission will only come through a "reformation at our very core" (Nel 2015:64). This reformation must contain an outward focus, as church is not simply for "my benefit" or the status of the church in society, but also, reaching those outside of the church (Nel 2015:117).

Reflecting on the writings of the Apostle Paul, Nel states that "God is the One who builds: the congregation is his field, his building and his temple. Father, Son and Spirit are intimately involved in this act of construction, making it happen" (Nel 2015:16). Here Nel is helpful as he points out that it is the people who are helping in the ministry, in fact, they are "partnering with God" in bringing the gospel to the unchurched. Nel echoes the words of Armstrong who calls us to see that evangelism is at the heart of our mission—it is not something we do, but rather who we are (Armstrong 1979:66).

Nel's understanding of the connection between identity and mission is transformative for modern youth ministry. He is helpful in calling us to see that it is our identity that determines our purpose (Nel 2017:4). There must no longer be a perceived split between who we are and what we do. In other words, there is no place for a program that causes a division between evangelism and our core identity as seeking to be disciples of Jesus who pursue spiritual maturity. In addition, it is crucial that *who we are* shapes *what we do* and we must be careful of programming a division. In the next chapter we will

examine more closely the Attractional Model of youth ministry and, in particular, the Funnel as proposed by Duffy Robbins. These models are organized to run various ministries that are designed to move a person from outside of the church (and outside of a relationship with Jesus) down an assortment of developmental levels, until they are a mature follower of Jesus who is able to engage in evangelism on their own. These levels, or modes of operation, while connected to each other, are separated through function and even identity. They are designed with various outcomes and structures in mind and are targeting a different audience each time.

Many proponents of this model have claimed that this approach is sound. Clark describes it in glowing terms as “the most effective, historically viable, and biblically appropriate of contemporary youth ministry models” (Clark 2001a:118). However, is this true? On close examination we will see that it is built on a *division* of ministries rather than, as Nel would say, a “plaiting” which creates a unity. Wright is highly critical of this division of evangelism and discipleship, which includes, in his mind, the “prioritization of evangelism,” stating that it leads to “spiritual shallowness, immaturity and vulnerability to false teaching.” In addition, he believes that it brings growth without depth, and embodies the rapid withering away that Jesus warned about in the Parable of the Sower (Wright 2010:284-285). One outcome of this model is the One-Eared Mickey Mouse, where the youth are seen as an “other” part of the church with little connection to the congregation as a whole.

3.5 The One-Eared Mickey Mouse

In 1989, Dean Cummings-Bond wrote that the church resembles a “one-eared Mickey Mouse.” He told his readers that the main circle (Mickey Mouse’s head) is the church, or more specifically, one’s involvement in the total life of the church. However, churches have often “corralled youth ministry, not within the daily rhythm of the church, but outside of it like a smaller circle that is tangent to the larger one, like a one-eared Mickey Mouse” (Cummings-Bond 1989:76-77). He describes a youth group as functioning apart from the church and taking on a life of its own, separate from the life of the multigenerational church. Kenda Creasy Dean takes a hold of this image and claims that it dominates mainline Protestant youth ministry (Dean 2004:186). This removal of young people from the life of the church has far-reaching and disastrous consequences as it removes youth from the “interpretive lens of the broader Christian community and separates them from intergenerational witness and role modeling” (Dean 2004:186). Furthermore, it separates youth from the theology of the church as a whole, creating an impassable chasm (Dean 1998:32). This chasm is often visualized in architecture by churches “exiling” the youth group to the church basement (Dean 2004:10).

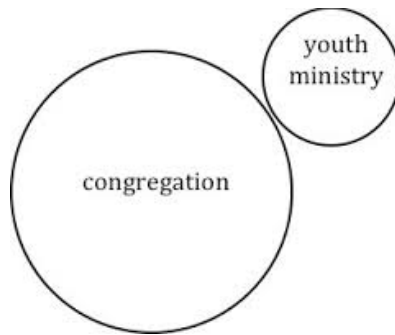


Figure 0.1 One-Eared Mickey Mouse

By exiling youth to a distant room meeting and removing any opportunity for multigenerational Christian witness, we are shielding young people from faithful adults and instead, we provide an “idiosyncratic experience of Christianity that exists nowhere but the youth group” (Dean 2004:186). When the church is built on various ministries that have little connection to one another, we will see a disconnect, rather than a wholistic functioning together. When a youth ministry is designed to reach unchurched youth through activities that bear little to no resemblance to their identity as the body of Christ, it is not surprising that we see an outcome like the One-Eared Mickey Mouse, where there is a separation from the larger body rather than a relationship to the whole church.

We will see in the next chapter that the first level of the Funnel (the Come Level) promotes the dichotomy between evangelism and discipleship and is characterized by modes of ministry or events that bear little resemblance to practices that should be commonly associated with the church. In fact, the first level is purposefully designed to resemble secular culture and entertainment rather than the Kingdom of God. Understanding that youth ministry is to be driven by our identity in Christ is transformative in that it shows us that reaching those who are outside of the church is not synonymous with running a program that reflects their world. In fact, our identity will actually help us to reach them because, as Nel reminds us, God is missionally active in this world.

4. The Priority to Build

4.1 The Failure to Build

An effective ministry philosophy, according to Wilhoit, must be shaped through a careful study of Scripture, and must be continually re-evaluated in light of a constant study of the Word of God (Wilhoit 1991b:69). Root echoes this, noting that the normative texts of the Christian tradition are essential in our theological thinking (Root & Creasy Dean 2011:43-44). This reflects Osmer’s call for theological interpretation in the normative task. Stated simply, one of the key factors that precipitated the crisis in youth ministry in North America was the failure to build lasting Christian maturity into

the lives of many young people. Dean and Foster offer a stinging rebuke of modern youth ministry practices, claiming they have been inadequate in helping young Christians to become spiritually mature. They claim that instead of meeting the spiritual needs of young people and providing avenues that promote maturity, we have provided entertainment in its place. They believe that while youth are looking for something or someone that is “capable of turning their lives inside out and their world upside down”, we have “offered them pizza instead” (Dean & Foster 2004:9). In a later writing, Dean goes further in her critique of the church’s failure to produce maturity. She believes that many North American churches have offered a “kind of diner theology: a bargain religion, cheap but satisfying, whose gods require little in the way of fidelity or sacrifice” (Creasy Dean 2010a:10). Dean also asks: “How can mainline Protestant youth ministry move beyond the shallow end of the theological pool? This much seems certain: youth will not leave the shallow end of the pool unless we do” (Creasy Dean 2004:174). If Dean is correct, youth ministry has clearly failed to reach what should be one of its primary objectives: building young people who, while they may still be “young”, are strong in the Christian faith and have a grasp on what it means to follow Jesus and head towards spiritual maturity. This is an area where we must think carefully about the interplay between our culture and our theology. Youth ministry has failed to live out its theology in modern culture. If one holds to a position of “evangelism as the priority” as the Attractional Model of youth ministry advocates, it must not be to the neglect of building the faith of young people who are already in the church, as well as those newcomers we successfully reach.

4.2 A Biblical Model of Building: 1 Corinthians 3:10-17

In addressing Osmer’s call for theological interpretation, it is important to examine what the New Testament states regarding the importance of building. It is my view that a fundamental theological text for a healthy youth ministry is the Apostle Paul’s exhortation in 1 Corinthians to “build well.” This text is crucial as it exhorts us not simply to preach Christ (evangelism) but also to build with care. The text reads:

¹⁰ According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. ¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— ¹³ each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. ¹⁶ Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple. 1 Corinthians 3:10-17 (English Standard Version)

In this exhortation, Paul warns the Corinthians about the importance of creating a strong church. He urges them to build it on Jesus Christ and to great take care in what materials are used, given the final judgment of each person’s work. He ends by encouraging his readers to see that what they are building

is no ordinary structure, but rather God's temple indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In this passage, Paul uses, in Fee's words, "the strongest possible terms," imploring them to build with "imperishable materials that correspond to the church's foundation—Christ crucified" (Fee 1987:128). Hollander points out that it is the Apostle's desire to show the importance of being an excellent builder—there are those who "who stimulate the Christian community and work hard for the promotion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ," through the use of the best materials. There are, however, others who are "less qualified, less stimulating" who build with wood, hay and straw (Hollander 1994:93-94).

Paul informs his Corinthian audience that, as a "master builder," he laid the foundation the church now rests on, which is Jesus Christ (v.10). This reflects common New Testament theology in which Jesus is the foundation or cornerstone (Eph 2:20, 1 Pet 2:4). Kistemaker points out that this foundation is without fault, and any fault with the building must be attributed to "careless work performed by the builders of the superstructure" rather than the substructure itself (Kistemaker 1993:110). Thiselton comments that the building depends on Jesus as the foundation for its "existence, coherence, and identity" (Thiselton 2000:310). Collins sees this foundation as drawing attention to the uniqueness of the gospel that Paul preached (Collins 1999:149). Perkins believes that Paul is again reminding his hearers of the gospel he preached to them (Perkins 2012:73). It is on this gospel that youth ministry must be built.

Paul moves to an exhortation to build with care, telling us that the connection between this foundation and the superstructure that is built upon it is crucial. This building (God's temple, the church), must reflect and closely resemble this foundation. Fee helpfully points out that the quality of the superstructure must be appropriate to the quality of the foundation, which is Jesus Christ. In addition, Fee notes that the superstructure must also relate to the character of this foundation (Fee 1987:139-140). Perkins believes that Paul is expressing anxiety about his own efforts because the phrase "labored in vain" is similar to his words in 1 Thessalonians 3:5 and Philippians 2:16 (Perkins 2012:75). The question before us in this examination of youth ministry in North America is, do modern attractional models "build well"? Thiselton notes that this theme of careful building must be seen as a "central motif within a Christocentric and eschatological frame" (Thiselton 2000:310). This stems from Paul's belief that the judgment of the builder (reward or loss) depends not on motive or mere ability, but rather on the materials used. He cites six different materials, which appear to be in two distinct categories. On one hand is gold, silver, and precious stones, on the other is wood, hay, and straw. Hollander's observations are helpful here, stating that builders must take great care as there are excellent as well as inferior materials to build with, and, in his words, "this choice of material had direct consequences for the building itself, the church." He points out that the three materials of wood, hay, and straw were commonly known as materials that were easily burnt by fire, and that this weakness was often seen in the Old Testament (citing Exodus 15:7 and Zechariah 12:6) (Hollander

1994:94-95). While wood, hay, and straw are easily combustible, the other materials are not. This use of the appropriate materials is a necessary aspect for the successful building (Thiselton 2000:310) and is a rebuke to anyone desiring, as Garland notes, to “build with human wisdom” and construct a “flimsy house of straw” (Garland 2003:117).

Paul clearly teaches here that the choice of material and subsequent use bears an outcome on the rewards, or lack thereof, when standing in final judgment. The Apostle gives no explanation as to what the positive reward consists of if one builds with gold, silver, or costly stones, he will “simply receive his reward” (v. 14). He is slightly more explicit in outlining the use of bad materials, stating, “he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire” (v. 15). Ciampa and Rosner offer a helpful comment on the clarity of the final outcome. In their words: “No trace of indistinctness will be left, and no one will think a retrial necessary. The *work of Christian leaders will be shown for what it is*” (Ciampa & Rosner 2010:154 italics theirs). This revelation of *workmanship* is revealed through the fire of God’s judgment. Thiselton refers to it as an “apocalyptic epiphany,” and a “universal disclosure that removes any veil of ambiguity and hoping-for-the-best” (Thiselton 2000:312 punctuation his). Keener notes that the “metaphor of testing or purifying substances by fire appears commonly in ancient literature” as well as in the Old Testament (Proverbs 27:21; Isaiah 47:14 and Zechariah 13:9) (Keener 2005:43). Barrett simply notes: “unworthy building materials are consumed; worthy remain” (Barrett 1968:89).

In relating this passage to youth ministry in North America: what materials will lead to successful youth ministry? What will be “burned up”? What will survive? There appears to be an agreement among New Testament commentators that there is a contrast between building with human wisdom and the message of the cross. There is also a contrast between using materials that are based on what may be perceived as successful given modern wisdom rather than spiritual wisdom. Simply stated, the fire will expose what materials provide lasting value (Garland 2003:118). Ciampa and Rosner cite that the materials that will lead to incineration are those “in keeping with human wisdom instead of the wisdom of God, which is the fullness of the message of the cross” (Ciampa & Rosner 2010:156). Fee stresses that what is important here is not the specific differences between the materials in each category (for example, is gold better than silver), but rather the imperishable nature of some building materials over others. He notes that the “good” materials of gold, silver, and costly stones “represent what is compatible with the foundation,” which is the gospel of Jesus Christ and him crucified. Human wisdom, and the building materials associated with it, according to Fee, belong only to this present age and will pass away (Fee 1987:140). What appears to be happening in Paul’s mind is, as Conzelmann points out, not merely judgement but a “process of disclosure” (Conzelmann 1975:76).

In the final analysis, this strong warning from the Apostle Paul provides a much needed theological reflection on the practices of modern youth ministry in North America. Garland believes that due to shoddiness in building, the Christian church can be “destroyed by insiders, not by outsiders” (Garland 2003:120). The goal must be, according to Kistemaker, “quality craftsmanship” and a performance that edifies the individual members of the church (Kistemaker 1993:110). This church, the *ekklesia* or community of believers, must, according to Kirk, be built up by the Christian leaders (Kirk 2012:570). There is the possibility of building the church, and more specifically, a youth ministry, in a way that may indeed burn up and disclose the poor workmanship. Barrett notes:

“The point appears to be that the day of judgement is marked by conflagration and that a workman caught in the flames of his own badly constructed house runs the risk of being engulfed in them. In fact, he will escape but it will be as one who dashes through the flames, safe, but with the smell of fire upon him (Barrett 1968:89).

Fitzmyer’s comments on this passage are helpful as he calls us to see that there must be a careful choice of building materials in ministry. This work of ministry, and more specifically, evangelism, will “be scrutinized and judged for its adequacy and durability” and the final quality will be brought to light and tested by God (Fitzmyer 2008:192).

4.3 The relevance to North American Youth Ministry

When considering the state of North American youth ministry, Fee’s comments on this passage are appropriate and, in my opinion, prophetic. He writes

This text has singular relevance to the contemporary church. It is neither a challenge to the individual believer to build his or her life well on the foundation of Christ, nor is it grist for theological debate. Rather, it is one of the most significant passages in the New Testament that warn—and encourage—those responsible for “building” the church of Christ. In the final analysis, of course, this includes all believers, but it has particular relevance, following so closely as it does vv. 5-9, to those with teaching/leadership responsibilities. Paul’s point is unquestionably warning. It is unfortunately possible for people to attempt to build the church out of every imaginable human system predicated on merely worldly wisdom, be it philosophy, “pop” psychology, managerial techniques, relational “good feelings,” or what have you. But at the final judgment, all such building (and perhaps countless other forms, where systems have become more important than the gospel itself) will be shown for what it is: something merely human, with no character of Christ or his gospel in it. Often, of course, the test may come this side of the final one, and in such an hour of stress that which has been built of modern forms of *sophia* usually come tumbling down (Fee 1987:145).

It is my belief that the crisis in modern North American youth ministry has come about due to a lack of an effective proclamation of the gospel and a resultant failure to build into maturity those who do profess faith in Jesus. The Attractional Model of youth ministry is geared to do just that: attract. This means that success can be judged merely in how many attend an event where the gospel is to be preached, rather than on how many actually hear the message and respond. Following on from this,

churches have either been unable or unwilling to move on from an attractive program that is committed to evangelism to one that is able to build with gold. The result is a building made of straw.

In later chapters, I will examine the common youth ministry strategy that concentrates on employing entry level activities designed to attract youth so they can hear about Jesus. While there is a clear focus on discipleship or building, this comes *after* evangelism. On one hand, this makes clear sense, you cannot build what you do not have. However, as we reflect on what should be happening in youth ministry today in North America, we must ask: “Is evangelism through and entertaining activity the starting point for youth ministry?” One corrective for the church in North America is to take the Apostle’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 3 to heart and shift our focus away from evangelism followed by a discipleship program. Rather, is it possible to have a structure that, built on the foundation of Jesus Christ, builds strong disciples (those within the church) and, at the same time, gives a clear witness to those outside of the church as to what it means to follow Christ?

4.4 A Biblical Model of Discipleship: Matthew 28:19

1 Corinthians 3:10-17 requires a thoughtful reflection on what it means to build strong youth ministry in North America. A key element of this building is based on the call of Jesus to make disciples. While Matthew 28:19 may be familiar to many in the church, it must continually move us towards a focus on discipleship, especially in the examination of what successful youth ministry must look like today. The words of Jesus to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19) have been central to the mission of youth ministry in the North American church. A close examination of this text is helpful as a corrective to some of the practices that have led to the state of modern youth ministry. It is clear from this text that “being a disciple” carries with it a serious and long-term focus on following Jesus. Bosch writes that this theme of discipleship is “central to Matthew’s gospel and to Matthew’s understanding of the church and mission” (Bosch 1991:73). While there are numerous aspects that can be highlighted and analyzed in this verse, there are six aspects that should be noted and then related to youth ministry: the need for relationship, discipleship as modeling and imitation, the requiring of obedience, the need for longevity, the reality of suffering, and, the fact that disciples produce more disciples.

Rengstorf notes that the verb “make disciples” (μαθητεύσατε / matheteusate) comes from μαθητής (mathetes) and “denotes the man who directs his mind to something.” This word carries with it the understanding of being a pupil, someone in training, and is the usual word for apprentice (Rengstorf 1967:416). This process is not merely gathering information, but rather, seeking to reach a goal that is directed by another person (Rengstorf 1967:417). They also point out that μαθητής implies “the existence of a personal attachment,” which shapes the life of the one being discipled (Rengstorf 1967:441). Louw and Nida see μαθητεύσατε as also carrying the understanding of “promoting the

cause of a leader” (Louw & Nida 1988:470). There is a clear connection here to youth ministry, where there is (often) a personal attachment between the discipled (the youth) and the older person who is discipling. Australian psychologist Steven Biddulph describes young people as “role model seeking missiles looking to lock on a target” (Biddulph 1997:147). With this in mind, discipleship is a natural fit for youth ministry. It is necessary to note that this relationship requires a commitment from both parties and should not be seen as a short-term relationship. While the three years that Jesus spent with his disciples must not be used as a fixed template for the amount of time it takes to disciple someone, it can be seen as an indication that this relationship requires some degree of time.

There appears to be a clear failure in North American youth ministry in fulfilling this discipler role. There may be a number of reasons for this. It may be due to a shortage of equipped older youth leaders who have the time, ability, or the inclination to devote themselves to a relationship with a youth. Could it be that an Attractional youth ministry focuses much of its time and energy in a program that attracts, and this does not leave much time for a relationship of discipleship between adult and youth? Dean points out that many adolescents experience “profound abandonment,” and, therefore, have a deep desire for people who will relate to them deeply and “know” them (Dean 2004:230). Successful youth ministry must be organized in such a way as to meet this need.

The long-term discipleship relationship requires that the person who is discipling is one who can model what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. King describes this generation of young people as one that is “looking for adult leadership that will believe in them, listen to them, understand them and model being authentic followers of Jesus Christ” (King 2006:25). King’s words reflect an oft-repeated pattern from the Apostle Paul where he urges his readers to “imitate him,” “follow him,” or, “be like him” (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1, Phil 4:9, 2 Thess 3:7). Dean, who has written extensively on the impact of an adult to young person relationship, believes that the existence of an adult in a young person’s life is often the most important factor in a young person’s decision to adopt the Christian faith and make it personally significant (Dean 2004:243). She uses the terms “spiritual friendship” and “holy friendship” to describe a relationship built on mentoring and discipleship, and sees this as “bearing enormous significance for youth ministry” (Dean 2004:140, 233). This relationship must be more than simply companionship. Youth ministry must have, as one of its foci, a commitment to the development of interactions within the group that promote and facilitate this relationship of imitation. This may be done in a smaller group or one to one. Nel sees this process as “perfecting” or helping someone to be spiritually self-reliant. This happens when someone discipled another (Nel 2015:187).

One issue that may characterize a group committed to the Attractional Model is that the focus is on either the size of the group (larger equals more successful) or the amount of youth attending an event. There may also be a focus on proclaiming the gospel at the expense of developing a deep relationship

with an individual who longs for a relationship of Christian “intimacy” with an older person. If this happens, the crisis facing North American youth ministry will continue.

Another important part of making disciples is the command to obey. As France explains, being a disciple means leading a life of observing Jesus’ commandments and requires “whole-hearted commitment” (France 1985:415). Craig Blomberg points out that the call of Matthew 28:19 carries with it a dual challenge; non-Christians are challenged to follow Jesus, and then, as new Christians, they are to be nurtured in what it means to follow Jesus in obedience. In Blomberg’s words: “There must be a balance between evangelistic proclamation and relevant exposition of all parts of God’s Word, including the more difficult material best reserved for the mature” (Blomberg 1992:433). Dean believes that the relationship between a mature Christian adult and a youth can open the door to spiritual practices that will allow “vulnerability patterned after the self-giving passion of Christ rather than the self-destructive passions of consumerism” (Dean 2004:231). If Dean is correct, there is a lost opportunity attached to the Attractional Model of youth ministry, as youth may need, and even want, a relationship that calls for sacrifice and obedience. A youth ministry committed to attraction can be hesitant to present the hardship, sacrifice and difficulties that may come with following Jesus. This is due to the eagerness to attract youth through a program that makes entry desirable, easy and fun.

Discipleship carries with it the idea of long-term learning and following. Hagner believes the call of Jesus in Matthew 28:19 emphasizes longevity rather than a mere communication of the gospel. He writes:

The emphasis in the commission thus falls not on the initial proclamation of the gospel but more on the arduous task of nurturing into the experience of discipleship, an emphasis that is strengthened and explained by the instruction “teaching them to keep all that I have commanded” in v20a. To be made a disciple in Matthew means, above all, to follow after righteousness as articulated in the teaching of Jesus (Hagner 1995:887).

Nel agrees, noting that the process of discipleship “never quite comes to an end” (Nel 2015:187). This is a corrective against organizing a youth ministry that is top-heavy towards evangelism with a shallow focus on discipleship. As Hull notes, discipleship must not be a short-term event. Rather, he points out that it is a “whole life” event that the church must be totally committed to (Hull 2006:24). Wright comments that teaching and discipleship go together as “essential parts of mission” (Wright 2010:284-285). One of the goals of discipleship must be to “embed” young people in the church and to promote the fact that following Jesus is not a phase or something merely for the young. I will address this later when I discuss longevity and also the role of intergenerational ministry.

While the constraints of this paper do not allow a full treatment of this topic, it must be noted that the call to follow Jesus carries with it the call to suffer. Rengstorf’s comments are helpful as he points out

that μαθητής carries with it the obligation to suffer (Rengstorf 1967:449). When Jesus issued the call to follow him, he called disciples to carry their cross (Matt 16:24-26, Luke 9:23, Mark 8:34). This call to carry a cross inherently brings with it suffering and possibly even death. The message of suffering is a difficult one to mesh with a program that is dedicated to making it easy for an unchurched youth to come and hear the call of Jesus. It is my belief that the message of Jesus to carry your cross and to “come and die” for him is a message that is at odds with a program that promotes fun and makes following Jesus easy.

Finally, the words of Matthew 28:19 carry with them the command to “go”. Bosch notes that *matheteusate* occurs only four times in the New Testament, with three of them in the gospel of Matthew, and, in his terms, this is a “sober injunction” to go (Bosch 1991:73). He encourages the Christian community to see that it is in mission where we find our true identity, as we bring the message of new life and salvation (Bosch 1991:83). Nel points out that the call of Jesus to become a disciple carries with it an ongoing process. Once a person becomes a disciple, he also becomes someone who calls others to come under the lordship of Jesus. The call of Jesus continues through the disciples that follow him. Nel notes that the verb “make disciples” is the only imperative in this passage, thus meaning that it is “constantly valid—then, now, and in the future” (Nel 2015:200). In short, Nel’s teaching directs us to the idea that disciples make disciples. He points out that Christians are able to build the church through the spiritual gifts they have received from God, and, in addition to this, through the equipping that ought to come via others in their local church (Nel 2015:17). He provides a list of these activities that are helpful for building up the members of the local church, which, of course, should include young people. Among these are encouragement, admonishing and cautioning, patience love and truth speaking, growth in the knowledge of Jesus, and service to the community (Nel 2015:18). These activities are greatly enhanced and much more effective when believers are unified as they communicate the gospel in word and action. With this in mind, it is important for youth ministry to contain spiritual practices that will promote these activities.

5. Authentic Evangelism

5.1 Evangelism Defined

The Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization offers a helpful definition of evangelism:

... to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus still calls all who would follow him to deny themselves,

take up their cross, and identify themselves with his new community. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his Church and responsible service in the world (Lausanne 2018).

This definition calls for a clear proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus. It also requires “presence” in the world so that there can be dialogue with the unreached that entails listening as well as speaking. Finally, it urges us to not hide the call for obedience and discipleship that must accompany following Jesus. When considering what should be happening in youth ministry today, there must be a focus on evangelism that requires these three aspects: clarity in our message, a “holy” presence, and action among those outside of the church. Richard Armstrong sees evangelism as not an attempt to prove God’s existence, but rather to “share one’s experience of satisfied needs” (Armstrong 1979:37). He provides a helpful definition of evangelism:

By evangelism I mean reaching out to others in Christian love, identifying with them, caring for them, listening to them, and sharing one’s faith with them in such a way that they will freely respond and want to commit themselves to trust, love and obey God as a disciple of Jesus Christ and a member of his servant community, the church (Armstrong 1979:53).

Armstrong sees this as being a personal thing, as opposed to a simple program, because the Christian faith is about a person and is transmitted through persons (Armstrong 1979:60). It is interesting to note that he sees a confusion about the “meaning of evangelism” and the “means of evangelism,” stating that quite often people are angry with the way it is done rather than with the actual message that is being presented (Armstrong 1979:54).

I have been advocating a critique of the youth ministry practice that is built around seeking to draw the unchurched newcomer to an attractive event. The event is designed to entice them into attending with the hope that they will eventually hear about Jesus. Rick Caldwell, writing on evangelism in Benson and Senter’s *The Complete Book of Youth Ministry*, expresses this view, urging youth ministers to use *any* event to attract youth. He cites hayrides, concerts, cookouts, swimming parties, breakfast meetings, and all-night lock-ins. He notes that there should be an emphasis on food such as pizza, ice cream hamburgers or tacos, as “youth usually come in big numbers for free food” (Caldwell 1987:317). Noted American youth worker Chris Folmsbee points out that these evangelistic events are often centered on a theme designed to attract and entertain, and usually revolved around sports, movies, or music. He describes these events as an “engaging activity such as a movie, a competition, a race, or a horror house” followed by a talk that “plants the gospel message in the minds and (hopefully) hearts of the youth.” In addition, these events are designed to reach a wide variety of youth subcultures from “jocks to nerds, to gear-heads to greenies” (Folmsbee 2006:27).

5.2 Modern Criticisms of the Attractional Approach to Evangelism

There have been recent detractors toward this understanding of youth evangelism. Mark Yaconelli, the son of Youth Specialties founder Mike Yaconelli, has written a scathing critique. He calls entertainment based youth ministry a “ministry of distraction,” and believes that this style of programming stems from parental anxiety (the desire to provide a “safe” environment for youth combined with the hope to keep their children in the church), as well as the need to control outcomes. Yaconelli believes that youth can be hard to control and predict, therefore, we design a program that can bring a predictable outcome such as fun. This program, in the mind of many, will also bring general conformity of behavior (Yaconelli 2006:44). His critique is direct and to the point:

Noticing young people’s discomfort with adult forms of faith and desperately seeking to keep youth engaged, some churches develop ministries of distraction. Inspired by parachurch youth ministries from the 1950s, like Youth for Christ and Young Life (whose founder, Jim Rayburn, once wrote a book entitled *It’s a Sin to Bore a Kid*), ministries of distraction keep youth moving from one activity to the next: rafting trips, pizza parties, game nights, ski retreats, beach fests, music festivals, amusement parks, taco-feeds, scavenger- hunts, crowd-breakers, raves, skits, and whatever other activities attract kids. It’s a Nickelodeon approach to youth ministry that seeks to appeal to kids’ propensity for fun and recreation. This is how churches respond to youth who cry “Church is boring!” it’s the ministry of excitement; discipleship through fun, culture-friendly, “Christian-lite” events. Like parents who pop in a video to entertain the kids when relatives arrive, the idea is to keep the youth people from running out, to keep them in the general vicinity of the church, to keep them happy until they’re mature enough to join the congregation (Yaconelli 2006:44).

Folmsbee offers a thorough critique of this style of evangelism and, in his experience, these events worked against evangelism rather than helping the church grow numerically. The regular youth who came to the youth group did not learn how to organize an event that was centred around the gospel, nor they could not articulate the gospel, as this was always the duty of the speaker at the large event. He asks: “Considering all the time, money, and effort spent of event evangelism, how much is really accomplished?” (Folmsbee 2006:26-28). King is also critical, believing that it is much more important to have a program that creates an “authentic atmosphere for our young people to seek truth and discover who they are in Jesus” (King 2006:11). He also states that many youth groups are now “moving away from parties, picnics, Fear Factor kinds of things, to much more serious Bible study, prayer and things of that sort” (King 2006:54).

It is imperative that evangelism in youth ministry is removed from events that are built on perceived attractions that have little or nothing to do with proclaiming the gospel and the subsequent call to follow Jesus in all areas of life. Yaconelli is correct in his critique since this style of evangelism is proving to be increasingly difficult to defend in light of a modern North American culture that is exceptionally effective in providing secular entertainment. Alvin Reid believes that we must “retool youth ministry with a perspective of raising an army of missionaries instead of creating a culture of

games with a little Bible sprinkled in.” He adds that, in order to reverse the trend of shrinking church numbers, we must “find effective ways to reach youth while they are young” (Reid 2009:433).

5.3 Questioning Modern Evangelism

As I reflect on Osmer’s normative task and ask, What should be happening in youth ministry today in North America, it is clear that evangelism must be on the list of ministry priorities. It stands to reason that if the church does not add new members, we will eventually cease to exist. In fact, one of the essential qualities of the church, according to Nel, is that it is a “missiological organism” (Nel 2002:66). In other words, our youth ministry must be committed to reaching those outside of the church and it must be characterized by an environment and program that enables effective evangelism. Hough and Cobb agree, insisting that evangelism apart from a community can limit the Christian story’s power. However, in a context of “mutual concern and caring” that the community provides, there is a greater likelihood of someone understanding the story of Christ and it’s saving power (Hough & Cobb 1985:54-55). With this in mind, we must reflect on Browning’s call to understand that questions must guide us in our theological reflection. Questions such as: “What, within a particular area of practice, are we actually doing?” and, “What do we consider to be the sources of authority and legitimation for what we do?” must shape our thinking. These determine what we should be doing and the “accuracy and consistency of our use of our preferred sources of authority and legitimization” (Browning 1996:48-49).

The crisis in North American youth ministry must evoke questions issuing from our practices, since these practices have not blessed or expanded the Christian church. Churches and parachurches have placed a priority on attracting the vast number of unchurched youth, however, instead of the church growing larger (and stronger) it has become smaller. Combined with this loss of numbers appears to be a loss of spiritual strength—there seems to be a spiritual immaturity that is a result of some of our practices. In light of this, there must be a revisiting of some of our central texts to see if our practices need to be reshaped in light of what is happening. Texts such as 2 Corinthians 4:1-6 and 1 Thessalonians 2:1-7 need to inform our questioning of the Attractional Model implemented in many North American churches (I will be examining these texts in the later chapter on Ethical Reflection).

In 2016 *Group* magazine had, as their lead article, a challenge for youth ministry to “grow up.” The article is a passionate cry for a paradigmatic shift away from any programming that distracts or hides Jesus to a program designed to clearly help connect students to Jesus. The heartfelt passion of the author is clear:

I’m not suggesting we ditch our programs, but the standard must be: “How is my program helping individuals meet Jesus?” If whatever we’re doing is not setting us up to make personal, one-on-one connections between students and leaders, or between teenagers and

teenagers, then we're missing what Jesus really cared about. Read the first half of John 10 and the Parable of the Lost Sheep (Matthew 18) again, then use these Jesus-imperatives about leadership as your determined filter in every program decision (Anonymous 2016:34).

Evangelism must be divorced from events that have little to do with the proclamation of the gospel, and, in addition, the events surrounding evangelism must take on a character that is in line with the gospel. There must be harmony between the evangelistic message and what surrounds this message. Reflecting back on 1 Corinthians 3, we are reminded of the Apostle Paul's teaching that the foundation is Jesus Christ, and we must be mindful of Kistemaker's call to build on this using materials that are in harmony with that very foundation (Kistemaker 1993:111). These materials must not only be in harmony with Jesus Christ but must also aid in our evangelistic efforts. Nel (2015) is correct in pointing out that our identity and our mission are intertwined in a way that makes them indistinguishable. In fact, our identity must shape us to think evangelistically as we move outside of the Christian gathering (the weekly meeting) and into the marketplace (the normal "Monday to Saturday world"). Michael Green offers a helpful picture of how the early church grew numerically, noting that it simply grew out of a faith that proved to be "authentic and satisfying" (Green 1970:236). Stark agrees, calling Christianity "attractive and liberating" (Stark 1997:211). He points out that this new faith grew mainly due to "the greatest of all mass marketing techniques: person to person influence" (Stark 1997:208).

5.4 Confusing Attraction with Evangelism

There can be a tendency to confuse attendance with successful evangelism. This can be one of the pitfalls of the Attractional Model. Since this model, as the name implies, is built on attracting, the leader can feel that a good job was done simply if some new people show up. Folmsbee notes that the success of modern youth evangelism is often judged simply on the "number of participants or the number of prayers spoken" rather than other factors such as joining the group (or church). He notes that this is unfortunate, as it produces "greed" and "pushes youth ministries to search for events that will attract an even larger crowd" (Folmsbee 2006:29). This runs contrary to judging success by a change of the heart, the advent of faith in Jesus Christ, or a change of lifestyle. The Apostle Paul, in 1 Thessalonians 1 tells his readers that he knows that "God has chosen them" because when they heard his preaching this message came with "power, the Holy Spirit, and with deep conviction." Later in that chapter he tells them that they have "become a model a model" to all the believers in the region and how their "faith in God has become known everywhere" (1 Thess 1:4-10).

Effective youth ministry must encourage and equip the members of the group to be confident, not only in living their faith, but in sharing it as well. It will equip a young person to be able to verbalize the gospel in a way that is not only appropriate for their age group, but also in line with what is set out in Scripture. A successful youth program will be made up of several components that will all assist in

reaching young people who do not regularly attend church. Small group Bible studies, the main gathering, and a mentoring relationship of leader to young person, are all practices that should encourage youth by giving them confidence of the truth of the gospel. These practices must also equip youth by giving them training and advice. Folmsbee's critique of the Attractional is correct as it can lead to young people trusting the program and the leaders rather than equipping them to evangelize their peers.

6. Producing Longevity

6.1 The Lack of Retention

Youth ministry in North America is characterized by a lack of retention among its youth and the numbers resemble a pyramid; as youth grow older, there are fewer of them around. For example, there tend to be less older teens than younger teens and less people in their early twenties than in the later years of high school.

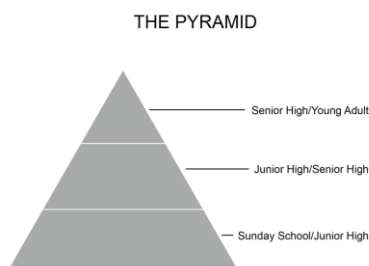


Figure 0.2 The Pyramid

In the popular Canadian Christian periodical *Faith Today*, Alex Newman states that “Parents, pastors, and youth workers have known for some time that when students leave high school for the workforce or additional education, their chance of taking faith with them are low” (Newman 2018:34). Sharon Ketcham observes that “graduating from high school may be synonymous with graduating from church” (Ketcham 2012:8). Black agrees, stating that graduates from high school seem to also graduate from church and religious involvement (Black 2006:19). King notes that most young people “walk away from the institutional church when they reach late adolescence” and the majority do not return (King 2006:11). Good youth ministry must be characterized by longevity among its adherents. In addition, it must actively equip and enable faithful endurance among those who join the group and profess the Christian faith. To do this, the church must be willing to re-examine its practices in light of this lack of longevity. In light of this crisis, we must be willing to also examine the means we use to

attract young people to Christianity, and whether there is a link between the means used to attract them and their walking away from the faith.

Clark finds the lack of longevity among young people unsurprising, saying: “It is little wonder that churches in every tradition lose large numbers of young people, with the first wave leaving early in high school when they get too busy for church, and the second shortly after they graduate from high school” (Clark 2016b:20). Clark believes that churches in North America have basically “set their young adrift” by allowing them to “interpret and integrate faith” on their own, rather than having older people who cared for them and interested in helping their spiritual development (Clark 2016b:20). Ketcham questions whether there is not a retention problem, but rather, an “integration” problem. She notes that if the problem is retention, they were connected to the faith community and then left. In her view, youth ministries “do not appear to be helping youth become part of the community of faith” (Ketcham 2012:12). Gibson agrees, claiming that most church congregations “construct paradigms that isolate children to do their own thing” in a youth program, rather than by being a part of the larger congregation (Gibson 2004:8).

6.2 Intergenerational Ministry

Youth ministry appears to be discovering that one of the key elements to good practice is to encourage a strong network of relationships and community, not only within the youth program but the whole church as well. This must be the paradigm as a corrective to the One-Eared Mickey Mouse described above. Chap Clark observes that many youth leaders are now aware that youth ministry must, in his words, “be deeply embedded within the ministry of the church.” He believes that youth ministry must now be seen as a “holistic partnership between youth ministry, congregational leaders, parents, and the congregation at large” (Clark 2016:17). Nel somewhat agrees, arguing that we must place youth ministry inside the sphere of the church. In his Inclusive Congregational Approach to youth ministry, he sees the role of the parents as central. He warns that youth ministry must not be seen as separated from the life of the congregation. His theological definition of youth ministry is helpful:

Youth ministry is a comprehensive congregational ministry in which God comes, through all forms of ministry and with especial regard to parents (or their substitutes), with a differentiated focus to youths (as an integral part of the congregation), and also with and through the youths in the congregation to the world (Nel 2001:12).

Closely related to this is facilitating intergenerational relationships between young people and others of various older ages. The research of Aoki et al shows that churches who actively select mentors will “reinforce the values and beliefs embraced by the congregation” (Aoki et al 2000:381). Their words are helpful as a starting framework:

The church community should be one of the environments where adults and adolescents naturally gather to share common questions and concerns about life and faith. We recommend that congregations be deliberate in programming opportunities for adolescents and adults to

work, learn, and worship together. Otherwise, youth and adult programs will run parallel without points of intersection. Unfortunately, this pattern is typical of some traditional, age-segregated congregations (Aoki et al 2000:382).

Contrast this with the work of Hilborn and Bird, writing in the context of Great Britain, who claim that many churches have maintained “negative generational distinctions” and barred younger members of the church from leadership and decision making. They claim that churches can often treat youth work as a “mere adjunct to the main business of the congregation” and have “failed to train and mentor young people for ministry” (Hilborn & Bird 2002:201-202). The *Hemorrhaging Faith* in Canada concludes that mentorship is a key element to producing Christian growth (Penner et al 2011:52). They note that “parental figures” and those who assume a “quasi-parental role” play a crucial part in the passing on of the Christian faith (Penner et al 2011:46). Dean agrees, stating that for a young person to grow spiritually they must have a “web of support,” and she says that “vital Christian faith” will not survive when a young person is out of relationship with others (Dean 2010b:16). Gibson urges churches to be intentional in providing opportunities for young people to meet with older Christians who live “authentic Christian lives” and are readily available to talk about relevant issues (Gibson 2004:10). Dean and Foster state that adult to youth relationships play a “critical” role in shaping faith identity (Dean & Foster 1998:83). Black says that a young person needs to “see models of faith” and have an opportunity to discuss what God is doing in their life with peers and older adults (Black 2006:27). It is interesting to note that Fashbough believes that the first principle in youth ministry is that the spiritual growth of the youth is in direct proportion to the spiritual growth of the adults. He believes that if adults are being discipled and learning how to share their faith, an “authentic ministry to and with youth will emerge” (Fashbaugh 2005:25). Intergenerational witness will provide a double blessing for the church, not only do youth need to be integrated and blessed by the older members, but it will strengthen the church to have the witness of faithful youth in their midst. However, as Cannister points out, this ministry between the older and younger may not happen automatically: it will require intentionality to make it happen (Cannister 2013:137).

Seibel and Nel have provided a helpful way forward toward the creation of a pathway of intergenerational ministry between older and younger members of a congregation (Seibel & Nel 2011). Writing specifically about the integration of Generation X and the church at large, they offer a helpful paradigm for passing on the faith from one generation to the next. They note the need for the church to experience a renewal by allowing the younger generations to set the new traditions in this postmodern context. This concept of “traditioning” (Leith 1990:34) or reshaping the faith in a way that is meaningful to new generations of church members aims to provide for the “incorporation of each new person and generation into the community of faith” (Leith 1990:34). Seibel and Nel believe that churches are characterized by a widening inability to connect with a changing culture, which means

they will constantly struggle to stay in touch with this new culture, and this endangers the ability of these churches to endure (Seibel & Nel 2010:4). With this in mind, Seibel and Nel call for two “dynamics” that will bring about this process. The first of these is to aim this process at Generation X, which is the first postmodern generation of adults and their children (Seibel & Nel 2010:4). The second dynamic of this traditioning process is to actively engage Generation X into the life of the church. Seibel and Nel see this as an important step as they can aid the church in connecting to the postmodern world, which is a very different world to the one the original traditions were formed in (Seibel & Nel 2010:4).

In addition to this process of traditioning, Seibel and Nel cite the themes of “return and release” from Leviticus 25:8-55 as a model for incorporating a younger generation into the life of the church. While Leviticus may be concerned with a redistribution of the resources of the land leading to restoration, Seibel and Nel broaden this as a call for the elders of the church to return all claims of power and influence back to the Lord. In addition, they must develop a culture in which power is distributed more evenly among the generations. It is their belief that this will empower Generation X to be the first postmodern generation to contribute more fully in leadership and decision making processes (Seibel & Nel 2010:5). The older members of the congregation must also “return any undue claims” they have on the church’s essential goods, as these are the property of Jesus alone (Seibel & Nel 2010:6). The church must then “release” the younger members from whatever dynamics prevent these younger members from having influence on the church itself. In fact, the younger members must be “granted the freedom to help shape the future of their respected traditions” (Seibel & Nel 2010:6).

Seibel and Nel offer a number of helpful practical ways in which the older members of a congregation can facilitate this return and release of the younger members. These are: a commitment of older church members to view new generations not as competitors, but as collaborators in shaping new traditions; a commitment to sharing resources with this younger generation; a willingness to listen to these younger members and equip them for leadership and decision making; the granting of freedom to influence new spiritual traditions; creating dialogue between various members of the congregation; and finally, the movement away from a culture of control to a culture of cooperation (Seibel & Nel 2010:6).

6.3 The Role of the Family

The role of parents in helping the Christian faith pass from one generation to the next is an important part of the successful transmission of the Christian faith. The *Hemorrhaging Faith* study of Canada notes that, “Whatever parents do, their children are likely to do also. Parents have an integral role to play when it comes to modeling and teaching religion” (Penner et al 2011:43). McGonigal believes that the family must have an “evangelistic relationship” and often children learn the faith merely through observance. He writes:

The children and youth learn of God's love for them by observing the daily model of adults and through their own interactions with adults—in the home and on the street, through the exchange of intellectual ideas and business transactions. Resting and rising, work and play, family discussion and village commerce are all permeated with one message: there is nothing more important in life than the knowledge and experience of God's love. Kids participate with adults in life together, and in the process they grow in the knowledge and appreciation of God's love, as well as God's claim upon their lives. This lifestyle of love is the primary training vehicle for the assumption of full community responsibility as an adult (McGonigal 2001:127).

Nel agrees, stating that “Parents are the primary mediators in the relationship (or covenant) between God and families, and as such are key in the roles that humans play in the coming of God to children” (Nel 2001:12). Dean adds that in the Old Testament, parents were to show their children what it means to be godly and to “embody their own delight in the Lord.” These parents, given to young people by God, were all they needed for their “faith formation” (Dean 2010a:119-120). Black's research shows that family life and routines are very important in faith development and continued attendance in church. He states that “those who regularly ate meals with their families and talked about spiritual matters during the teenage years had different attendance patterns during the young adult years from those who did not” (Black 2006:28). With this in mind, it is important that youth ministry aids in this intergenerational family witness. One question that must be asked is, given the fact that many parents today are not Christian: should youth ministry seek to aim “upwards”? In other words, should we aim for Christian youth patterning what it means to follow Jesus in order that their parents may observe, and, thus, learn what it means to be a Christian?

6.4 A Way Forward

To implement a program that increases retention, youth ministry in North America must undergo a twofold shift. The first entails a movement away from a focus on evangelism that works to the detriment of the development of Christian maturity. The second shift must be a widespread understanding that our identity aids us in our evangelism and that our desire to grow numerically is intrinsically linked to who we are and what must characterize us as followers of Jesus. In other words, we must remove any strategy that promotes the dichotomy of evangelism and discipleship. A program committed to attraction first often suffers from an imbalance of too much evangelism, not enough discipleship. Jeff Anderle gives a picture of an attractional youth ministry and the impact it had on him as the youth leader:

For five years I followed the typical youth group structure- singing, crowd breakers, entertaining activities. We even spent a little time talking about Christ. But sometime between wiping egg off the floor from our latest gag and dreaming of the Video Toaster that would catapult me into big time youth ministry, the question hit me: What am I doing? I realized our youth program wasn't imparting to kids the essentials for their spiritual growth. Even I related with Christ as though he were a vaguely remembered distant relative rather than an energizing friend. Our program based ministry, since it did little to change kids, had burned me out (Anderle 1995:14).

Anderle's description of a "typical youth program" fits in with a night devoted to attracting newcomers, rather than a night that will build up those who are already following Jesus Christ. We will see later in this paper that the dichotomy between evangelism and discipleship may not be as large as some churches make it out to be. A program geared towards Christian maturity can also be naturally effective in reaching the unchurched young person.

In the parable of the sower and the seeds (Matt 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20, Luke 8:4-15) Jesus tells us that when the seed falls on good soil it produces a large crop. Youth ministry must, at its core, be committed to the "good soil" of promoting longevity via spiritual maturity. Oestreicher, who outlines a brief history of modern American youth ministry in *Youth Ministry 3.0.*, states that today, "nourishment of the soul must be our number one priority" (Oestreicher 2008:114). King agrees, stating that we must "focus on creating environments for genuine spiritual transformation" (King 2006:11). In the letter to the Hebrews we read that "We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end" (Heb 3:14). Do our methods of attraction assist "holding our original conviction firmly," or do they merely attract with little long-term results? To continue the farming analogy, if a farmer was committed to crop production and he was able to sow a great number of seeds, but most of them died before maturation, this farmer would rethink his methodology.

David Kinnaman of the Barna Group notes that, while there is still a large number of youth in American church youth ministries, they "are not growing up to be faithful young adult disciples of Christ" (Kinnaman 2011:21). In fact, he calls the ages of 18-29 the "black hole of church attendance" with this age group being "missing in action" from most churches (Kinnaman 2011:22). Successful youth ministry must not only actively work to produce retention, but retention combined with a growth in maturity as the youth grow older. In fact, it is not unreasonable to assume that as young people transfer from a younger group to an older one, this leads to an increase in overall numbers. One of the main goals for the modern church must be the reversal of the decreasing pyramid. To do this, we must adopt a program that has a better chance of retention. If a church can keep the youth, and this is combined with evangelism, the succeeding groups should be larger than those preceding them.

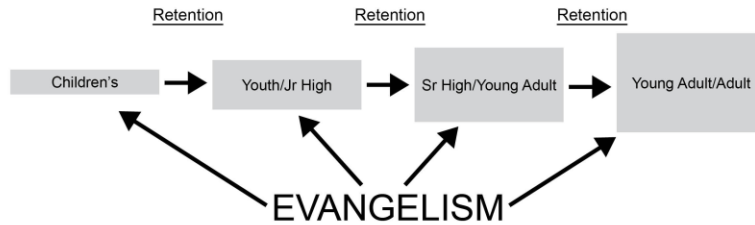


Figure 0.3 Evangelism

It is important to note that if the aim is to see young Christians become older Christians, one help will be to have them associate with older Christians in order to observe and learn that the Christian faith is a lifetime pursuit. Gibson notes that the key to helping adolescents remain active in church past high school is to have them “connected to the entire body of Christ” (Gibson 2004:9). Dean urges us to ask if we are “helping young people become part of the larger body of Christ or involving them in one more glorified extracurricular activity?” (Dean et al 2010b:8). Quite often youth ministry can open itself to the critique that it does not equip or facilitate the movement of youth into the larger multigenerational congregation. If there is little to no connection between the practices and content of the youth group and those in this multigenerational gathering, it will be a difficult transition for young people used to a type of program that bears little resemblance to the one the youth leader desires to move them into. Therefore, a Christian youth ministry must have, at its core, Christian content such as prayer, Bible study, and singing or worship in song. This content is what typically makes up the larger gathering. If a youth program consists of attractional content (e.g. activities that use fun or appealing cultural activities as the drawcard) transitioning from youth group to adult church will be problematic, due to the absence of activities expected in a gathering that is not attractional or evangelistic.

While evangelism is, and ought to be, a priority for youth ministry, longevity must be as well. To enable this, youth groups must adopt a number of, what Osmer calls, “good practices.”

7. Ethical Reflection

7.1 The Need for Ministry with Integrity

Richard Osmer has said that when we are faced with a situation that “brings us up short,” we must interpret this situation and “sort out how to proceed” (Osmer 2008:148). Earlier in this paper I have noted that Osmer, in conjunction with Browning, want us to see that our practices are filled with values and when our practice comes up short, we must examine the theory that led to this practice. This will call for an evaluation, and then possibly a new theory about how to proceed and establish a more effective practice. Following this, Osmer urges an ethical reflection as we think about our practices. It is my view that youth ministry in North America needs to submit itself to this process and

undergo a critical ethical reflection on some of its practices, especially in light of the ethical norms that are laid out in Scripture regarding deception and trickery.

7.2 The Challenge of 2 Corinthians 4:1-5

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he outlines his ministry, defending his practices and his preaching among them. Attacked by critics inside and outside of the church, Paul offers a clear explanation of his methodology that is a helpful template for youth ministry today, and is a rebuke against any strategy where the message of the gospel is obscured by a program that seeks to attract young people through activities that are enjoyable and appealing, but bear little, if any resemblance to the regular spiritual practices that will be expected if they are to become part of the church. The passage reads:

Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. ² Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. ³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

It is clear from the beginning of this passage that Paul is facing some sort of trauma, trouble, or difficulty as he tells his readers that he does not "lose heart." It is interesting to note the connection of this statement to the following ones concerning evangelism. Adversity and hardship could cause an evangelist to cut corners and adopt practices that are dubious and even dishonouring to God. Paul rejects any such ways, explaining that he avoided any type of approach that could be construed as shameful or deceptive. The phrase "secret and shameful ways" (τὰ κρυπτὰ τῆς αἰσχύνης / ta krypta tis aischynis) can be used to expose those who attempt to cover up their true intentions (Garland 1999:205). Paul is pointing out to his readers that his message and method was not cloaked in secrecy, but open to the scrutiny of the entire world, Christian and non-Christian alike (see Garland 1999:205). Garland observes that the noun "deception" (πανουργία / panourgia) comes from the Greek word that "literally means the readiness to do anything" and it can apply to someone who is deceitful and dishonest. In his words: "Such persons will stoop to any ruse to accomplish their dishonorable purposes, and they usually resort to secret plots and intrigues" (Garland 1999:205). It is relevant to this discussion that Garland believes this deception will not bring true success, but rather may lead to a "tangled web of deceit." Paul, however, urges a ministry that is candid and forthright (Garland 1999:206). Hughes points out that Paul has turned his back on any presentation of the gospel that is deceitful and says that the word for deception (πανουργία / panourgia) signifies a "cunning readiness to adopt any device or trickery for the advancement of ends which are anything but altruistic (Hughes 1962:123). Martin notes that "deception" was linked negatively with trickery or craftiness (Martin

1986:77). The Apostle tells us that not only did he avoid bad practice, but his confidence was in a clear and open presentation of the gospel. Martin notes that this “open declaration” of the gospel (φανέρωσις / phanerosis) is used by Paul ten times in this letter alone (Martin 1986:78). This important passage must inform our youth ministry practice guarding leaders against any program that is built on deception.

7.3 The Challenge of 1 Thessalonians 2:1-7

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, the Apostle Paul gives a brief summary of his visit to Thessalonica. As in 1 Corinthians 2, he defends his ministry against apparent attack and criticism. In this section, Paul states that he avoided the use of trickery. The passage reads:

You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results. ²We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition. ³For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. ⁴On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. ⁵You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. ⁶We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. ⁷Instead, we were like young children among you. (1 Thessalonians 2:1-7)

There are several key ideas in this passage that are relevant to our normative quest for what should be happening in North American youth ministry. Paul outlines to his readers the difficulties he faced before visiting them. However, rather than seeking to ease the natural obstacles faced when telling people the gospel, Paul did not resort to any methodology that could be understood as trickery. Morris notes that the word for trickery (δόλος / dolō) was understood in a negative light as “cunning” and was used to describe catching fish with bait and “thence it came mean any crafty design for deceiving or catching” (Morris 1984:52). Weima agrees, stating that this word means “deceit and treachery” and was used to describe wandering preachers and speakers who would “resort to various methods of deception in order to gain followers.” Weima observes that Paul was confident that the Thessalonians would see a clear difference between his methods and those of other speakers (Weima 2014:135-136). On a personal note, in my own experience in youth ministry it is interesting (and somewhat disheartening) to note how often I hear the expression “if you want to catch kids, you must use the right bait” as a way to defend the Attractional Model of youth ministry.

I would suggest that Paul’s comments are a counterintuitive approach to evangelism. Rather than adopting a methodology that was person-centred and designed to be pleasing and attractive to his target audience, he emphasizes, an “antithetical formulation” of pleasing God rather than people (Weima 2014:137). MacArthur’s observations on this passage offer some helpful concluding

comments: “Paul was the opposite of a false teacher: his message was the truth; his life was pure; and his ministry was honest, without hypocrisy or deception” (MacArthur 2002:38).

The Apostle Paul outlines a clear methodology of what we should avoid when preaching the gospel. He exhorts us to abandon any practices that hint of deception or trickery. He encourages clarity in our presentation of the gospel, and this means that youth ministers must take great care in evangelism. We must never organize a program that invites young people to hear about Jesus but does this through a tactic of promising one thing with the hopes of delivering another.

8. Good Practice

8.1 The Need for Christian Disciplines

Christian youth ministry must operate within the parameters of Christian disciplines. In other words, Christian groups ought to do Christian activities. While the phrase “Christian activities” is open to a broad interpretation, there appears to be some consensus that it can be defined as those pursuits that will shape the Christian to deeper Christian faith. Dean and Foster note that Christian practices are activities designed to “form us” spiritually and lead us into Christian maturity. This goal of Christian maturity is something that we “practice in faithful pursuit” (Dean & Foster 2004:107). Wolf and Bass refer to Christian practices as those activities done by Christian people “in response to and in the light of God’s active presence for the life of the world” (Wolf & Bass 2002:18). Black’s research shows that those who belong to a “Bible or Christian club” had stronger church attendance after high school. Similarly, he notes that the spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible reading were “linked significantly with attending church during young adult years” (Black 2006:29).

Connected to this is the fact that the program must reflect our message and the message must sit comfortably within our program. Reflecting back on Paul’s exhortation to the Corinthians, the building must reflect the foundation (1 Cor 3). However, Pearson and Gapes wonder if there is now an “amnesia” among youth when it comes to Christian traditions (Pearson & Gapes, 2002:19). Is this an amnesia, or is it the simple fact that they were they never taught these traditions? This may be a result of a number of factors: either youth leaders are unsure of how to promote and put into place these Christian practices, or the program did not allow time for them, due to the commitment to evangelism and the attractional activities and events designed to bring in newcomers.

Many are now expressing the view that the effectiveness of a Christian youth program lies not on how many youth are attracted to an event, but rather on how well it can perform activities such as Bible study, prayer, and worship in song, among others, and how these activities can produce Christian maturity among the youth who participate. Jo Whitehead believes that we must create a culture and

environment where patterns of relating are formed that shape a young person's understanding of God (Whitehead 2014:149). She urges that these patterns should include prayer, reflection, worship, reading Scripture, fasting, retreat, as well as hospitality, and corporate meals. She sees these practices as being "spiritually educational" and the choice of which practices to incorporate in our youth ministry depend on a number of factors such as our own preferences and experience, the youth and their cultural contexts, as well as our location, resources, and time available (Whitehead 2014:150). Whitehead proposes that in a world where youth are shaped through consumerism and life online, youth ministry must seek to "earth" young people to become more aware of God's presence. She believes that it must also foster a sense of their own uniqueness as people created in God's image who know that God is present in their lives and desires a relationship with them (Whitehead 2014:147). Leith appears to agree, stating that evangelism must give "more attention to memories and traditions" in a secular culture (Leith 1977:29). Nel calls the church to "shift its attention" towards deeper questions, such as "how we can create space for God in the daily lives of young people" through spiritual disciplines (Nel 2018:27). Horton believes that this present generation has a "renewed interest" in tradition and the roots from the past (Sweet 2003:118). It is my opinion that the development of age appropriate Christian activities is crucial for an understanding of good practice in youth ministry. These activities must not only sit in the realm of Christian disciplines, but must also stem from our identity as a Christian gathering. In the same way the hockey teams play hockey and chess clubs play chess, Christian youth gatherings must "do Christian things."

Osmer encourages us to learn from good practice in order to provide normative guidance that will reform our present actions and "generate new understandings of God, the Christian life, and social values" (Osmer 2008:152). He encourages us to see that learning from good practice can simply help churches do things better. With this in mind, I believe that we must listen to the increasing chorus of voices challenging us to change some of our practices in youth ministry and move towards the adoption of different ones. In 2002, Nel called for the local church to "reform, renew, and revitalize" youth ministry in this (then) new century (Nel 2002:82). Christian practices would aid in bringing a reformation and renewal to youth ministry, as they lead young people into an encounter with God, and also equip them to know him on a deeper level. Noted youth ministry trainer Mark DeVries likens youth ministry to a dance floor with rotting wood and large cracks, which causes the dancers to continually injure themselves. He claims that "failure to attend to the dance floor ensures that a toxic environment will infect the entire system" (DeVries 2008:52). DeVries relates this toxic environment to many churches who fail to give attention to systems, priorities, and infrastructures that will ensure a proper youth ministry outcome (DeVries 2008:53). I believe that, in the end, Nel's thesis on the separation of identity and mission is a helpful corrective to the crisis in youth ministry today. To cite his words, "to the extent that we have lost the radical nature of the church, we might have lost the art of discipleship" (Nel 2017:30).

In light of the church's commitment to attractional practices, are we neglecting the core practices that have historically built the church? It is my belief that this has indeed happened and that we must heed Nel's call for reformation and renewal.

8.2 Hemorrhaging Faith and the State of Canadian Youth Ministry

To understand the state of Canadian youth ministry and the necessity for what entails good practice, it is vital to examine *Hemorrhaging Faith*. This study, done in 2011 by James Penner and associates, is a quantitative survey of 2,049 young adults. In addition, they carried out a qualitative survey of 72 young adults. In the words of the authors, the goal of these surveys was to answer two fundamental questions: 1 To what degree do young adults in Canada today stick with or drop their Protestant or Catholic faith? And, 2 What keeps them in the faith, and what helps to usher them out (Penner et al 2011:10)? *Hemorrhaging Faith* has been influential in the study of Canadian youth ministry, as it is the largest survey of its kind and, being Canadian rather than being from the United States of America, is indispensable for understanding the state of Canadian youth ministry, especially what it says in regard to spiritual practices and traditions.

The study concludes that "today's emerging generation want to experience God in a very tangible and personally meaningful way" (Penner et al 2011:47). They want to discuss difficult spiritual topics, are willing to "go deep," and want "life applications" (Penner et al 2011:66). According to the survey, they "crave depth," and are comfortable taking spiritual risks and being "over their heads," since this is preferable to stagnation and "settling for comfort" (Penner et al 2011:68). Young people are eager for dynamic community and growth in Christ. They want help in hard times and want to be able to lead people to emotional healing. They want to use their talents to make a real difference in the community (Penner et al 2011:52). These youth want "authentic expressions of faith". However, they claim that "churches are not places where they expect to experience the love of God and answered prayer," nor are churches places where they can ask spiritual questions about how to live out their faith (Penner et al 2011:111).

One of the conclusions of the study is that churches are presenting a superficial understanding of the gospel to youth and young adults (Penner et al 2011:111). The authors observe that the Canadian church must "repent of transmitting a consumeristic 'easy road' understanding of the gospel." They suggest that this will happen if we better understand the spiritual formation of young adults from childhood onwards (Penner et al 2011:111). They urge Christian practices such as *lectio divina* as a helpful addition to a youth program.

As one practicing youth ministry in Canada, the results of the *Hemorrhaging Faith* survey resonate with my experience and must be reflected in our theology and praxis. In light of the results, youth ministry practitioners must be willing to rethink any methodology that works against us, especially when it comes to developing faith practices that will bring maturity and long-term participation in the Christian faith community.

8.3 The Importance of Community

Christian Smith utilizes the word communion when describing community and offers a helpful definition. He calls communion, “a type of shared human existence and reciprocal action that advances the personal fulfillment of those involved through relationships of mutual confirmation and affirmation.” He states that this network of deep relationships “involves the mutual giving of personal selves as gifts of fellowship and love for the good of each person concerned” (Smith 2010:68). This understanding of communion and community is what must characterize the Christian church. In the Scriptures the church, as well as the nation of Israel, were to be attractive communities, where newcomers could observe the quality of relationship that was concerned with the good of the other and this would lead to participation in the covenant community. Psalm 133 reflects this beginning with the exclamation: “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!” The psalm finishes with the statement that “this is where the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.” In the mind of the Psalmist, there is a clear connection between the unity (community) of the nation of Israel and numerical growth. This is reflected in the New Testament, where, in a paragraph that is summing up the rise of the early church, Luke tells us that “the Lord added daily to their number” (Acts 2:47). This statement comes after Luke’s description of the church engaged in the Christian practices of Bible study, prayer, fellowship, and the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42). Luke tells us that “the believers were together and had everything in common,” and that they “met every day either in the temple courts or in homes.” Both the Old Testament and the New Testament encourage us to see that unity among believers and participation in a loving community has a growth element to it. This unity and community must be a key part of good practice within youth ministry and will help to bring a reversal of the crisis in modern youth ministry.

I want to suggest that the development of a youth ministry community is crucial for successful youth ministry, as it can offer an effective witness horizontally and vertically. A loving community offers a safe and healthy space for youth to witness the quality of godly relationships within the group (a horizontal witness). This can often open them up to a willingness to seek out God and turn to him in faith alongside their peers. In addition, this community, by its very nature, celebrates Christian practices and shares relationships centered on Jesus that are, by their very nature, evangelistic. As the Psalmist teaches, the pursuit of unity, which is a characteristic that ought to mark Christians (cf. John 17:23, 1 Cor 1:10, Eph 4:13), leads to numerical growth. Good youth ministry practice must

encourage, incorporate and program for strong community and relationships among the youth who attend the program. Heitink, following Kuhnke, believes that koinonia is the key concept for understanding the function of the church. He believes that, “the credibility of the Christian faith depends on whether Christians succeed in developing a kind of life in which the weaknesses of the modern lifestyle are diagnosed and overcome” (Heitink 1999:278). Nel agrees, stating that evangelism (he uses the phrase “missional awareness”) springs from a “koinonial awareness” and that koinonia is a necessary part of effective evangelism (Nel 2015:116). In the world of today’s youth, it is hard to imagine a group growing numerically that is marked by division and disunity. As a personal example, I recall talking with a young man as to why he came to youth group, his reply was simple yet striking, “because the people are friendly here ... and we all get along.”

Andrew Zirschky has offered a helpful understanding of the role and nature of koinonia in youth ministry. He is critical of modern youth ministry, claiming that many churches are characterized by a distinct lack of koinonia. He urges the church to not be self-seeking like many gatherings in the local culture, and believes that “communion is meant to describe the social operating system of the church” (Zirschky 2015:75). Zirschky believes the church must be typified by “communion,” which is self-giving love for one another (Zirschky 2015:79-80) and believes that youth today are “seeking presence,” that is, they long for the experience of being known and available to one another (Zirschky 2015:16). This communion must be expressed in a number of relational features including social equality, selfless self-giving, diverse unity, and the pouring out of our selves in care and love for others. We do this, he says, because we are aiming to follow the pattern set by Christ who loved us and gave himself for us (Zirschky 2015:83).

In addition to koinonia being reflected in the regular youth gathering, Zirschky calls for a movement beyond the youth group walls, claiming that “If we hope for youth to experience themselves as part of the body of koinonia of Christ in the world, then moving our communal interactions beyond confined meeting times is crucial” (Zirschky 2015:38). Zirschky believes that many churches in North America are not characterized by deep relationships and that youth ministry has the potential to bring a positive relational impact these churches as older members witness the relationships within the youth ministry. This starts “the desire for genuine Christian community throughout the congregation.” He believes that the koinonia that is experienced in youth group could spread to the whole church and even the local community (Zirschky 2015:21). Here, Zirschky is reflecting on the link between identity and mission, and believes that when a Christian youth group not only understands its identity but also lives it out, this has a direct impact upon its mission to reach the unchurched.

8.4 The Necessity of Sharing Our Lives: 1 Thessalonians 2:8

In the second chapter to his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul outlines his affection for those he ministered to in Thessalonica.

⁶We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. ⁷Instead, we were like young children among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, ⁸so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. ⁹Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. ¹⁰You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. ¹¹For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, ¹²encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

In his letter, Paul uses strong, emotional language and describes himself in familial terms: a child, a mother, a father. For the purposes of this paper, I would like to concentrate on verse eight, where Paul provides an insight into one of his ideas of good practice when he tells them he “loved them so much that he shared with them not only the gospel of God, but his life as well.” This passage must be read in light of Paul’s visit to Thessalonica in Acts 17:1-9, where Luke records for us that Paul visited a synagogue “as was his custom” (Acts 17:2), and “reasoned with them from the Scriptures for three Sabbaths explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead.” It is clear from this passage of Scripture that Paul preached to a group of people that he had just met—there was no prior relational structure in place between the Apostle and his hearers. However, as a result of his preaching, Paul forms a strong relationship with those who accept his preaching.

1 Thessalonians 2:8 shows us the bond that Paul had with the Thessalonians who decided to follow Jesus. F. F. Bruce argues that the meaning here is that Paul was willing to put himself “at their disposal without reservation” (Bruce 1982:32). Leon Morris points out that the verb *ὁμειρόμενοι* (*homeiromai*) is a rare word and only found here in the entire New Testament. It can be translated as “being affectionately desirous of you,” and carries with it the meaning of a “real depth of desire” (Morris 1959:79). Hendriksen cites a sepulchral inscription where the sorrowing parents are described as “greatly desiring their son” (Hendriksen 1955:65).

The example of Paul, as shown to us in 1 Thessalonians 2:8, demonstrates the connection that must come through evangelism and that follows this evangelistic preaching. Hendriksen comments that Paul shows a “powerful combination” of preaching and affection (Hendriksen 1955:64). Morris states that Paul had a “total commitment to his task,” and he gave not only a message but himself to his hearers as well (Morris 1959:79-80). Thomas sees this relationship like that of a nursing mother with her child (Thomas 1978:254). Wannamaker says that Paul’s commitment to the Thessalonians was total. He did

not stay aloof, but rather was involved in their struggles and in this new faith of theirs. Wannamaker sees this relationship between Paul and the Thessalonians as the “new norm for true leadership,” and an “exhortation to mutuality and love that united them into a cohesive community, thereby strengthening them to face a hostile environment” (Wanamaker 1990:102).

This verse must have a modern application to youth ministry. In the following chapter we will examine the formation of the parachurch and its impact on modern youth ministry. One phrase that has become commonplace is “earning the right to be heard.” This is regularly interpreted as seeking to form a relationship with another person (usually a younger person) and then, after some time has passed, being able to share the gospel with them. This understanding has profoundly shaped youth ministry—we form a relationship in order to share our faith. However, I want to question this methodology in light of 1 Thessalonians 2:8, where Paul shares the gospel with a group of people that he has no previous relationship with. The only common factor is their Jewish heritage and their attendance in a Jewish synagogue. I would like to propose an alternate approach, where youth ministry seeks to form a community that reflects quality of relationship seen in the Scriptures. This community seeks to practice Christian disciplines and as it does this, it actively shares the message of Jesus in and through their network of friends and those in their world. A youth ministry that actively and boldly shares the gospel should become a youth ministry that develops a strong community. This community will then become a witness as well.

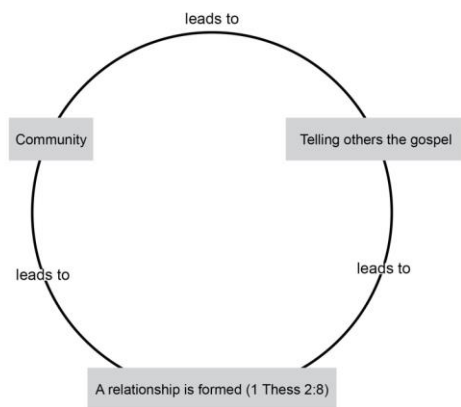


Figure 0.4 Community

9. Conclusion

Leaders in North American youth ministry are aware that there is a crisis. Youth ministry has been unsuccessful in building strong believers who, while young, are able to follow Jesus and maintain this

into adulthood. It has failed to reach the nonChristian young person in a way that is integrated with the normal practices of the church. Finally, there is an inability to build disciples who stay in the faith and become longstanding members of the church. As youth leaders reflect on the results of modern practice, there needs to be a process of examining their strategies to reach the unchurched in light of not only results (poor and successful), but also in light of their theology and whether their strategies are ethically defensible. There needs to be a recommitment to good practices in youth ministry, that will help to not only build the Christian young person but also equips them to reach out to those who are not Christian. In addition, these Christian practices will help develop the longevity that is lacking in youth ministry today. In addition, in light of Nel's thesis on identity and mission, there needs to be an examination of how to develop a youth ministry strategy that integrates evangelism and discipleship in a way that does not prioritize one at the expense of the other. Is it possible for a Christian youth group in North America to structure its program in a way that it is helpful in pursuing spiritual disciplines and maturity while reaching those outside of the group without a separate evangelistic program? In other words, can one program naturally achieve both discipleship and evangelism?

As we keep these questions in mind, we must first ask: Why do the current methods of youth ministry fail to retain young people in the church? What factors led to the incorporation of strategies that have produced this crisis in youth ministry? Why do these methods fail to build in spiritual maturity? Why does the Attractional Model fail to attract?

CHAPTER 3 UNDERSTANDING THE FUNNEL AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

1. Introduction

Why is there a crisis in the church in North America? Why is it failing to retain youth in its ranks? Why is there a lack of spiritual maturity among those who attend? When faced with a difficult situation or a crisis, steps must be taken to see the connection between what is happening and why it is happening. This may lead one to revisit their praxis and create a new strategy. Earlier, I have noted Browning's observation that practices are theory-laden, and, because of this, we must seek to find the vision behind these practices. In other words, we must ask why is this happening (Browning 1996:226). Heitink states that Practical Theology must be built on deep reflection on our praxis. This reflection ought to lead us to think about what is happening in light of our theory and theology (Heitink 1999:153). This then leads to a reflection on our understanding of theory, relevant Scripture, and the effectiveness of our practices in lieu of our culture. This may lead to a rereading of Scripture, and a revision of theory (Heitink 1999:153-154). Osmer refers to this process as the interpretive task, where one tries to discern why is this situation happening (Osmer 2008:4).

Youth ministry, like all ministry, is birthed in an historical context and shaped by cultural influences. This present crisis in youth ministry has come about from our context and cultural influences. My question is whether the modern Christian youth movement's relationship with parachurch organizations that arose in the early part of the twentieth century has led to the crisis we are now in. These organizations had, at their core, the desire for conversion rather than the development of spiritual maturity. In addition, they were committed to attracting youth via culturally relevant entertainment and activities. This led to the development and then widespread acceptance of youth ministry built on attraction, and thus the Attractional Model of youth ministry.

This Attractional Model of youth ministry, and, more specifically, the Funnel model did not come out of a vacuum. They were birthed in a culture that was increasingly exposed to the sophisticated entertainment of radio and Hollywood films. Youth evangelists incorporated this exposure to entertainment and used it to promote the gospel. Bergler states that in the 1950s "Christianity embraced fun and entertainment," even though they were wary of the morals it portrayed (Bergler 2012:174). He argues that evangelical Christians wanted their message to be exciting and offered "thrills" as well as a personal faith. He believes teenagers were attracted to this rendition of the faith because it was "much more appealing than the version they saw among their parents" (Bergler 2012:174).

Youth for Christ, and Young Life are two prominent parachurch youth ministries formed last century that utilized entertainment as a prominent feature in their evangelistic endeavors. These two movements are pivotal to understanding the development and popularity of an attractional model of youth ministry. The direct influence of these two parachurch youth ministries is paramount for an examination of modern youth ministry trends and programming strategies. Borgman calls Young Life's influence on contemporary youth ministry both "broad and unmistakable" (Borgman 1987:69). Senter agrees, stating that "churches have flattered the movement by imitating its strategies and methods" (Senter 1992:22). Jay Kesler, the former president of Youth for Christ U.S.A. comments: "There are very few things done in youth work that were not pioneered in Youth for Christ or Young Life—be it in Christian camping, various small group activities or music" (Schultz 1985:22).

The influence of these two organizations strikes a chord with the desire of North American churches to see a far-reaching impact in the area of evangelism. Both of these organizations have, at their heart, what Ladd and Mathisen refer to as a revivalist mindset, that is, the desire for conversion and the evangelization of unchurched youth (Ladd & Mathisen 1999:233). This desire for conversion and evangelism is what drives this attractional understanding of youth ministry. Bergler comments that these two groups set the pattern with their program of songs, games, skits, and entertainment. These are followed by more serious segments such as a talk or Bible study that are packaged with humor, stories and personal testimonies. He believes that this pattern is effective because it appeals to the desire that youth have for fun and belonging (Bergler 2012:220). He notes that the leaders of Youth for Christ promised teenagers that they could "have fun, be popular, and save the world at the same time" (Bergler 2012:148). In fact, Bergler uses the term "fun consecration" when describing the organization (Bergler 2012:151).

2. The Influence of Radio on Early Youth Ministry

To understand the development of Youth for Christ and Young Life, it is necessary to briefly examine the influence of radio on North American culture and how this shaped Christian leaders to combine entertainment and evangelism.

American Christianity has a long-held commitment to advancing its message through the use of modern communication strategies. Hart believes that, as far back as the First Great Awakening in America, evangelical Christians have shown "an ability for exploiting new communications technology and business practices to advance religion" (Hart 2002:174-175). In the early twentieth century, the emergence of radio as a common form of communication and entertainment, is one key factor in the quest to understand the development of attractional youth ministry. Mark Ward believes that "twentieth-century American religious cultural phenomena, from evangelical celebrities to

evangelical music, are hardly comprehensible without religious radio” (Ward 2013:102). One of the main reasons for this was simply the availability and rapid increase in ownership of radios in American households. In the 1930s, two-thirds of American households owned a radio and by 1940 the figure had risen to over eighty percent (Sterling & Kittross 1978:533). Radio had an impact not only in North American culture at large, but also, more specifically, on evangelism, especially evangelism to youth. Christians who were involved in evangelism were quick to discover radio as a means to amplify their message to a wider audience. More importantly, for the fact that so many people were committed to not only listening to the radio, but listening to programs of high quality caused some Christian evangelists to believe that secular radio had set a high standard of entertainment that must be met if one was to win the youth of the day. Carpenter notes that Billy Graham was influenced by radio announcers mimicking “their timing and timeliness with his own passion to save lost souls” (Carpenter 199:217). Torrey Johnson, the first leader of Youth for Christ and a key figure in the development of youth ministry in the twentieth century, wrote: “Isn’t radio part of every youngster’s environment today? Furthermore, doesn’t the world present its best via radio” (Johnson & Cook 1944:37)? In his mind, this meant that any attempts to evangelize youth had to be of the same quality as the entertainment the world provided. Johnson would urge evangelists to understand this high standard and to figure out what type of events youth would attend. Speaking of evangelistic gatherings, he wrote: “Dare to offer them something shoddy, and they’ll shun your meeting” (Johnson & Cook 1944:36). Hart points out that in the 1930s radio received widespread acceptance among Christian homes (Hart 2002:59). He notes that religious music and musicians became popular, “almost in the fashion of a religious vaudeville theater” (Hart 2002:59). In the 1940s, it became even more evident that the melding of ministry and entertainment was now patterned.

In addition to radio, the influence of the Hollywood movies added to the pressure for a style of evangelism that would be considered by the audience as high quality. Hart points out that Christian youth meetings could not be run in a way perceived to be second rate compared to the first class entertainment provided by Hollywood. In Hart’s words: “effective ministry to teens required the timing of the best comedy, peppy gospel music, references to current events, moving testimonials from converts—in other words, a good show” (Hart 2002:79).

The popularity and influence of this medium forced many evangelists to aim for a high degree of professionalism and programming excellence. In his writings on the beginnings of Youth for Christ, Johnson writes:

Oddly, radio has spoiled things for the careless gospel musician; for your young folk can hear, if they wish, worldly music, *perfectly produced*, any hour of the day or night. It is not that they appreciate the gospel less, but that they have found out what good production is, and brother, they’ll hold you to it. (Johnson & Cook 1944:36 italics theirs).

Bergler points out that Youth for Christ were building on the culture of entertainment and especially the impact of modern films on youth. He claims that the youth of America “demanded that Youth for Christ leaders provide them a Christian youth culture complete with fun, popularity, movies, music, and celebrities” (Bergler 2012:148). Torrey Johnson states that the aim of Youth for Christ was to:

Present the gospel in as attractive a form as anything presented by the world. We hoped, as a friend stated after one of the rallies, that young people would say, “The quality of this program is as good as anything the world has to offer.” At the same time, we were also praying that there would be *conviction* and as a result, salvation, consecration and revival at all of these meetings (Johnson & Cook 1944:22-23, italics theirs).

From this setting, Youth for Christ and Young Life, the forefathers of modern youth ministry, would arise and significantly shape the way youth ministry was done for the rest of the century. These two ministries were also foundational in the development of an attractional view of youth ministry.

3. The Formation of Youth for Christ

Founded in the late 1940s, Youth for Christ would have a major impact on the shaping of modern youth ministry, especially in regards to the formation of entertainment-based attractional ministry. Borgman claims that Youth for Christ established a template for the youth gathering that has become the “long-standing model for youth ministry—still much in force today” (Zoba 1997:20). Cannister sees the growth of Youth for Christ and the development of evangelicalism as inseparable. He contends that youth ministry prior to Youth for Christ was built on the nurturing of Christian youth, whereas Youth for Christ changed the focus towards youth evangelism (Cannister 2001:89). This transfer from nurture to evangelism is one of the key influences that shaped the attractional model of youth ministry and the development of the Funnel Model of youth ministry.

Youth for Christ (YFC) began in the 1940s and arose from the desire to see the large number of unchurched young people in the United States of America come to faith in Jesus Christ. Pahl writes that the birth of this movement came from the revivalist tradition that has a long history in American theology (Pahl 2000:57). Youth for Christ is especially important in this study of attractional youth strategy given the movement’s reliance on (then) modern forms of entertainment, as well as the fact that it became so influential and numerically large so quickly. In fact, Carpenter calls its early growth “astonishing” (Carpenter 1997:175).. Summing up the impact and style of this youth ministry movement, Hefley explains that it was “a combination of fast moving programs, Christian vaudeville and fervent revival-style preaching,” and that it “packed in hundreds of thousands throughout the United States and Canada while crusty leaders gaped in surprise” (Hefley 1970:14). While Youth for Christ was born out of preaching for conversion, which was something that churches were familiar with, the organization, in Carpenter’s words, “wed born-again religion to the style as well as the media of the entertainment industry” (Carpenter 1997:162). However, Carpenter notes, their brand of

revivalism was “much more daring and innovative than its predecessors” (Carpenter 1997:162). The influence of this organization on modern youth ministry must not be underestimated. It is a significant contributor to the role of entertainment in modern youth evangelism.

3.1 The History of Youth for Christ

While Shelley claims that the origins of Youth for Christ are difficult to ascertain precisely (Shelley, 1986:48), Borgman states that it was “born out of a prayerful conference in Indiana in 1944” (Borgman 1987:69-70). However, it is clear that there were a number of key factors that led to its development. One of these factors, stated earlier in this paper, was the rise of the impact of radio. Percy Crawford, a Philadelphia based preacher, hosted a regular radio show that began in the 1930s, titled *Young People’s Church of the Air*. According to Carpenter, this program was on a large number of stations across the United States, was filled with practical jokes, and moved at “breakneck speed” (Carpenter 1997:164). Crawford’s unique style became a template for youth evangelists and was a direct influence on the soon-to-follow Youth for Christ organization (Carpenter 1997:164). Cannister comments that Crawford was one of the first to see a connection between adolescent culture and its impact on Christian ministry (Cannister 2003:70). In fact, Crawford tried to use youth culture to his advantage in preaching the gospel. Cannister writes:

Crawford unapologetically used the music of popular culture to reach young people with the message of the gospel. And Crawford’s preaching was as bold as his use of music. He had no tolerance for superficial preaching. His spoke in the language of adolescents and courageously proclaimed the truth of the gospel using a plethora of Scripture. Because of his use of radio, his preaching and his meetings were rapidly paced so that radio listeners would not tire from “dead air” time. Many preachers, such as Jack Wyrzten and Billy Graham, were strongly influenced by the rapid fire, Scripture-filled, truth-telling style of Crawford (Cannister 2003:70).

In 1941, Jack Wyrzten, a New York based insurance salesman, began a weekly radio broadcast called *Word of Life* (Cannister 2001:88). Wyrzten’s wife had become a Christian at a conference run by Crawford, and Wyrzten would become his protégé (Carpenter 1997:164). Wyrzten was urged by Crawford to begin his own radio show (Shelley 1986:48) and so he began *Word of Life*. This show became very popular, and, in Cannister’s words, these broadcasts “galvanized many of the youth ministries that had come before” (Cannister 2001:88). In 1944, Wyrzten organized a youth rally in New York City, drawing over 20,000 people. In Illinois, a similar movement of youth rallies was being organized, the most noteworthy being the Chicagoland Youth for Christ rally, held on May 27, 1944. This rally was led by Torrey Johnson (who would soon head up the new Youth for Christ organization). The speaker being a local preacher named Billy Graham. The success of the Chicagoland rally was enormous, and other cities followed suit. McLoughlin states that there were four hundred cities running weekly Youth for Christ rallies by the end of 1944 (McLoughlin 1959:480).

This disparate movement of semi-related rallies joined together to form one organization. Senter writes that on July 29, 1945, 42 delegates from a number of different parts of North America, all of whom had been running rallies in the style of the Chicagoland rally, met at Winona Lake in Indiana and formed Youth for Christ (Senter 1992:117). The fourfold aim of this movement was:

1. To promote and help win youth for Christ everywhere
2. To encourage evangelism everywhere
3. To emphasize radiant, victorious Christian living
4. To foster international service of youth through existing agencies (Cannister 2001:88).

The motto adopted by Youth for Christ was simple and reflected their commitment to evangelism via culturally relevant entertainment: “Geared to the times and anchored to the rock” (Johnson & Cook 1944:17). Their goal was to be modern in the delivery of their message and the programming segments that surrounded it, yet still committed to preaching the Biblical message of salvation. It is clear that Youth for Christ lived out this motto and was not hesitant to use modern forms of entertainment to attract young people and assist them to hear the gospel message. Billy Graham said: “We used every modern means to catch the attention of the unconverted—and then punch them right between the eyes with the Gospel” (Ladd, & Mathisen 1999:113). Music was often a central component in Youth for Christ’s evangelistic rallies. Ladd and Mathisen note that Billy Graham would use a “variety of musical warm-up groups to share the meetings with him—a Salvation Army band, a brass quartet from Bob Jones College in nearby South Carolina, a child piano prodigy, and the ‘world’s foremost marimba player.’” (Ladd & Mathisen 1999:95-96 punctuation theirs). We see here a commitment on the part of Youth for Christ to attract with activities that bear little to no resemblance to the Christian identity of the movement. There is, in my opinion, a split between who they are and what they do.

3.2 Evening Rallies: Geared to the Times and the Need to Appeal to Youth

Youth for Christ became well-known for their Saturday evening youth rally. These rallies were intricately designed to reach their target audience of young people. They eschewed the traditional means of a church service and connected with the youth culture by riding on the back of popular youth interests. Shelley notes that the leaders of the organization designed all aspects of their rallies to be appealing to their target audience, from the music to the personalities that were on the stage (Shelley 1986:59). Johnson and Cook write that the meetings needed to be evangelistic throughout, slanted directly toward youth. They needed to be lively yet spiritual with spontaneity and dignity. Each

program was to be of the highest possible level and present the gospel “in an attractive a form as anything presented by the world” (Johnson and Cook 1944:22-23).

Each rally was organized with a similar program that, in Shelley’s words, consisted of “lively gospel music, personal testimonies from athletes, civic leaders or military heroes and a brief sermon, climaxing with a gospel invitation to receive Jesus Christ as personal Savior. This was revivalism tailored to youth” (Shelley 1986:49). The programs often included entertaining acts such as magic, a talented whistler, and musical oddities such as saws and single-string oil cans (Shelley 1986:49). In addition to an entertaining program, the leaders on stage themselves were entertaining, wearing, according to Hefley, “brashy” wide ties and even ties with battery-powered lights that would blink along with choruses such as “This Little Light of Mine” (Hefley 1970:14). What could be considered an extreme example of entertainment was “MacArthur the Gospel Horse,” who knelt before a cross during singing, moved his jaws, and would answer Bible questions via tapping a hoof (Hefley 1970:17). The use of acts such as this shows how far these rallies saw the need for entertainment in evangelism.

3.3 The Promise of Fun

Youth for Christ was built on the idea that a young person could come to a Christian gathering, hear a message about Jesus, and have a positive experience at the same time. To do this, Youth for Christ was aware of teen culture and utilized it to great effect. In essence, they were to use the culture of the world to further their goals for the Kingdom.

There are two noteworthy examples of how Youth for Christ combined trends that were popular outside of the church with their desire to reach youth. The first was a Christianized version of popular television game shows. Quiz shows, such as *The \$64,000 Question* enjoyed wide appeal and Youth for Christ began Bible quizzes that became very popular (Bergler 2012:152-3). Another example of the use of modern popular cultural phenomena was the Boltin’ Bishops—a car club in Southern California. In 1954, America was undergoing, in Hefley’s words, a hot rod craze (Hefley 1970:59). With this in mind, two men organized a car club for “fellowship for Christian rodders and as a means of winning unsaved rodders to Christ” (Hefley 1970:60). This car club gained some degree of publicity via a local newspaper, and various other car clubs were formed with the goal to combine hot rodding and evangelism (Hefley 1970:60).

It is clear that Youth for Christ’s methodology was to find something that was entertaining and attractive to young people and then use this as a front door to their preaching of the gospel. The more modern and attractive, the better. Whether or not there was a connection between these attractive

activities and the Christian message was unimportant. Hart describes Youth for Christ as a group that was a unique blend of gospel zeal and practical know-how that produced a culture that, to insiders, was fun-loving and vigorous (Hart 2002:81-82). Ladd and Mathisen describe the leaders of Youth for Christ as “accommodationists” who were also pragmatists (Ladd & Mathisen 1999:118). This combination meant that they would use any means necessary from modern culture to achieve the goal of revival. In short, Ladd and Mathisen state that Youth for Christ were committed to whatever worked when it came to attracting youth to a gathering where the message of Christ was preached (Ladd & Mathisen 1999:118).

It did not take long before Youth for Christ could see that something more was needed in addition to the weekend youth rally. When Bob Cook followed Torrey Johnson as the next president, one addition Cook brought was a weekly meeting to follow up the evangelistic rally. “The rally ideal is sound,” President Cook said, “but in most places it is just the show window. Let’s get something on the counters the rest of the week” (Hefley 1970:47). Senter notes that, in 1950, Cook hired Jack Hamilton from Kansas City to begin a national network of weekly clubs (Senter 2010a:222). By the next year, Youth for Christ claimed to have seven hundred clubs up and running (Senter 2010a:223). By 1963, the number had risen to over 3,000, according to Youth for Christ’s records (Senter 2010a:223), although, Hefley claims that the highest number was 2,763 in 1960 (Hefley 1970:77). This is the beginning of a funnel type of ministry, in which young people are attracted through a large event that revolves around entertainment, and then “funneled” into a smaller gathering designed to promote spiritual maturity.

Youth for Christ “clubs” soon appeared to become the backbone of the movement. Pahl calls them the “basic, grassroots units” (Pahl 2000:67). These meetings consisted of games, skits, singing, Bible study, and a discussion about a relevant issue for the youth (Pahl 2000:67). However, these clubs did not move away from being “geared to the times”. Bergler believes that these clubs were popular because they were fun and they gave teenagers a place to belong and present their Christian faith (Bergler 2012:151). Hamilton’s goal for these clubs was to be miniature Youth for Christ rallies, complete with “peppy singing, punchy prayer, student testimonies, guest speakers, and even Christian musical performers.” (Bergler 2012:151). It is interesting to note that these clubs increased the amount of their Bible teaching as the year went on (Pahl 2000:67). The more committed the youth became, the greater the teaching. Hefley states that the aim was to present a sharp, teen-g geared program that showed unsaved teens that Christians could have a good time, and to present the gospel in their own language and on their own level (Hefley 1970:78). He notes that the desire was to have programs that were “lively” and even “corny,” noting one program suggestion called a “Popcorn club meeting” where the leader would pop corn just before the meeting so that kids would smell it and want to come. They would then hand each teen a bag of popcorn as they entered the room. In the program there

would be short “popcorn” testimonies. Someone called “Pop Korn” (dressed as an old man) would come and tell corny jokes and give announcements. Finally, there would be a message that challenged kids to let God do for them what a little fire and oil can do for popcorn (Hefley 1970:77). In the clubs, the same methodology was used as in the larger rallies, with the same emphasis on entertainment.

3.4 Youth for Christ Toronto, Canada

Youth for Christ was launched in Canada just after the Winona Lake meeting in 1944 and utilized the same methodology as the United States. One of the key figures was Charles Templeton, who was born in Toronto in 1915 and discovered Jesus when he accompanied his mother to church in 1936. After Templeton married in 1939, he and his wife settled in Toronto, where he took over a vacant church and set up a ministry of evangelism.

In 1945, Templeton became a founding member of Youth for Christ International, and his methodology replicated that of his fellow Youth for Christ workers south of the Canadian border. As Kee notes, “while his message was old-fashioned, his methods were decidedly modern” (Kee 2006:143). Templeton was seeking to answer the question: How do we draw young people to hear the message about Jesus in a way that is appropriate to their culture? His strategy was to combine the “good old-fashioned gospel with the latest in Hollywood-style entertainment” (Kee 2006:149). “Our work is purely religious, but styled for young people in the tempo of the times,” Templeton told a reporter for the *Globe and Mail* newspaper (Kee 2006:149). Advertisements for rallies in Canada ran with the slogan: “In tune with the times,” (Kee 2006:144) and were filled with modern entertainment as a way to draw young people to hear his evangelistic preaching. His rallies were filled with jugglers, acrobats, and modern music and wholesome entertainment (Kee 2006: 146). According to Kee, the rallies were designed to be “never boring, fast-paced, and newspaper reporters sent to cover them had to remind themselves that they were at a religious function” (Kee 2006:154-156). In Canada, Youth for Christ continues the same pattern of energetic meetings filled with entertainment that was utilized in the U.S.A.

3.5 Impact of Youth for Christ

The impact of Youth for Christ was immediate, profound, and long-lasting. The pattern that they utilized in the 1940s was a mixture of polished, attractive entertainment followed by a sermon designed to call for a commitment to Jesus. Carpenter states that this movement became “the organizational core of the new evangelicalism” (Carpenter 1997:176). Their approach to attracting unchurched youth based on cutting edge, culturally relevant entertainment and polished music would set the tone for future youth ministries, most notably attractional strategies such as the funnel.

Campolo says “The Youth for Christ rallies of the late 1940s and ‘50s ... were intensely relevant and meaningful to a generation of young people” (Campolo 1989:195). He adds, “The movement spread everywhere. Nearly every city or town had its Saturday-night Youth for Christ rally. Lives were changed, missionaries were recruited, marital matches were made, and a good time was had by all” (Campolo 1989:195).

The format set by Youth for Christ more than half a century ago is still prominent in youth ministries today. Bergler’s opinion is that the youth ministry of today has adopted the models set out by Young Life and Youth for Christ in the 1950s (Bergler 2012:220). Bergler casts a negative light on this pattern believing the emphasis on fun and youth culture to be unhelpful and unproductive. He writes:

Songs, games, skits and other youth culture entertainments are followed by talks or discussions that feature simple truths packaged with humor, stories and personal testimonies. This pattern works because it appeals to teenage desires for fun and belonging. It casts a wide net—by dumbing down Christianity to the lowest common denominator of adolescent cognitive development and religious motivation (Bergler 2012:220).

The desire to engage with modern culture, and thus rely on entertainment to attract young people to Christianity, has led, in Bergler’s opinion, to a program that “dumbs down” Christianity and, therefore, has little depth.

4. The Ministry of Young Life

One of the central figures in the history of youth ministry is Jim Rayburn, the founder of Young Life. Rayburn’s influence cannot be overstated. Senter describes Rayburn’s youth ministry strategy as fundamentally different from anything that had preceded it (Senter 2010a:218). There are a number of areas where Rayburn’s ministry is still felt in youth ministry today, primarily, his desire to go outside of the church to reach young people. He would do this by befriending these unchurched youth with the hope of presenting the Christian faith in a way that was enjoyable and full of zeal (Meredith 1978:20-21). His goal was to remove the impression that church was, in his words, “boring” (Rayburn 1984:62). In addition, Rayburn established a number of Christian camps which he referred to as resorts, designed to give young people the best week of their lives in order to help them follow Jesus (Rayburn 1984:73).

4.1 Jim Rayburn’s Background and Ministry

Jim Rayburn was born in 1909 and was the son of a traveling Presbyterian evangelist. He grew up in a household that spoke strongly against the evils of drinking, card playing, dancing, and gambling (Meredith 1978:12). Rayburn often accompanied his father in his evangelistic work, but according to Meredith, he did not enjoy the environment of this evangelistic team, even when he later worked there

(Meredith 1978:12). Jim Rayburn III calls the environment his father was raised in “stifling” (Rayburn 1984:28). Rayburn’s mother had little patience or tolerance for “worldly” pleasurable activities, especially when it came to playing on the Sabbath (Rayburn 1984:12). Jim Rayburn III believes his father was raised in “religious drudgery,” and quotes his father as saying: “The problem with me is that I got starched and ironed before I got washed” (Rayburn 1984:12). However, a very different type of youth ministry would rise from this strict upbringing, one built on joy. It would become a revolutionary movement within a perceived stagnant religious system (Rayburn 1984:12).

Rayburn graduated from Kansas State University, where he had studied mineralogy. He decided to enter the ministry when he could not find a job in engineering. He and his new wife Maxine found work at a church in Chama, New Mexico. A year later, he moved to a new church in Clifton, Arizona. Shelley states that it was during this time that Rayburn found “his greatest satisfaction from his work with young people and his greatest disillusionment with traditional church life (Shelley 1986:52). It was here that he experienced an event that would not only change his life but set the course for much of modern youth ministry.

While ministering in Arizona, Rayburn found a copy of Lewis Sperry Chafer’s *He That is Spiritual*, written in 1918. Chafer was a popular Bible teacher, known for his Dispensational views and founding Dallas Theological Seminary (Hart 2002:34). In *He That is Spiritual*, Chafer argues that it is incorrect to abandon play and helpful amusements in order to be spiritual. Chafer argued that it was Satan’s desire rather than the will of God’s to deny fun to young people (Chafer 1918:68-69). Chafer wrote against the commonly held notion that the serious Christian must avoid fun, especially young Christians. Quoting Chafer:

Such a conception of spirituality is born of a morbid human conscience. It is foreign to the Word of God. It is a device of Satan to make the blessings of God seem abhorrent to young people who are overflowing with physical life and energy. It is to be regretted that there are those who in blindness are so emphasizing the negatives of the Truth that the impression is created that spirituality is opposed to joy, liberty and naturalness of expression in thought and life in the Spirit. Spirituality is not a pious pose ... It is a serious thing to remove the element of relaxation and play from any life (Chafer 1918:69).

Bergler notes that *He That is Spiritual* had a major impact on Rayburn as he realized the potential appeal that a combination of fun and spirituality would have on young people (Bergler 2012:148-149). This idea would lead Rayburn to devise a youth ministry strategy where, in the words of one biographer, kids could have “one heck of a good time” while hearing about Jesus (Meredith 1978:72). Meredith, in her study of Young Life, says that in this movement’s youth gathering, “entertainment was a key thing in proclaiming the gospel, it was a spiritual matter” (Meredith 1978:72). This concept of fun and entertainment in relation to evangelism became a key idea in Young Life’s ministry strategy (Meredith 1978:72). Soon after this experience, Rayburn decided to leave his ministry in the

Southwest of the United States and undertake fulltime seminary studies. In September of 1936, he arrived at Dallas Theological Seminary where Lewis Sperry Chafer, who had such a profound impact on him, was a professor. It was here that Young Life would begin.

Early in his time at Dallas he was approached by Clyde Kennedy, pastor of the Gainesville Presbyterian Church, who asked Rayburn to help reach unchurched youth in the local area. His request was simple yet groundbreaking: “I’m not particularly worried about the kids who are in. They’re safe, and as far as they’re concerned I don’t need your services. To you I entrust the crowd of teen-agers who stay away from church. The center of your widespread parish will be the local high school” (Calliet 1963:11-12).

Calliet comments that, while Kennedy would not realize it, this simple conversation would have a farsighted and far-reaching impact on youth ministry (Calliet 1963:11). This mandate for Rayburn to reach unchurched youth would set the course for much of modern North American youth ministry and from this conversation began, what Senter calls, “a missionary effort by Christian adults to win uncommitted high school students to a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ” (Senter 2010a:218). Rayburn took Kennedy’s challenge and worked tirelessly in his efforts to evangelize young people, with great success (Meredith 1978:21).

It was Rayburn’s view that every young person has the right to hear the Christian message in a way that makes sense to him or her. Shelley writes that Rayburn adopted modern youth vernacular in an attempt to make the Christian message more easily understood. He used youth vernacular like “gang” and “swell,” and pursued the “basic principles of communication in another culture like a foreign missionary” (Shelley 1986:59). Rayburn is often quoted for his famous phrase: “It is a sin to bore a kid with the gospel”. Miller points out that Rayburn used this phrase as an indictment against the Christianity that many churches were offering that, in his words was, cluttered with “so much religious debris that its attractiveness is obscured” (Miller 1991:74).

Young Life began from an organization that, at that time, was a popular form of youth ministry: the Miracle Book Club. Founded in 1933 by Evelyn McClusky, this movement was designed to help youth discover Jesus and witness to their peers. It experienced rapid growth (Cannister 2001:87). Rayburn, however, soon discovered that instead of reaching his target audience with his weekly Miracle Book Club, “everybody I wanted to reach was out on the football field, and everywhere else, right while we were having our club meeting” (Rayburn 1984:44). The Miracle Book Club turned out to be a disappointment and in his son’s words, “working no miracle” (Rayburn 1984:44). In 1940, Rayburn dropped the Miracle Book Club style of meeting. Calliet writes that at this time, Rayburn

realized that what was required was a completely different picture of what a Christian youth club needed to look like (Calliet 1933:13). Calliet states:

It dawned on him that the time at which a meeting was scheduled had to be selected in terms of teenagers' value conflicts. From this angle, it became obvious that a meeting held just after classes amounted to a scholastic tail end at which a "real guy" would be sure to turn thumbs down. But fix a meeting for, say, 7:30 p.m. and the whole affair takes on a new look. Likewise, if the meeting takes place away from a school premises it will seem more like an adult occasion, and the teen-agers will feel they are invited to a social affair of their own instead of just another extracurricular activity for sissies and "squares" (Calliet 1963:13).

We can see here the beginnings of Rayburn's strategy for evangelism. The meeting must be attractive in every aspect, including the time and the place. In addition, Rayburn made no apologies for seeking to attract the leaders among students. In his mind, these attractive students were the quickest way to produce numerical results (Rayburn 1984:45).

4.2 Methodology

It is clear that Rayburn's philosophy of youth ministry grew out of his negative experience with the organized church. Rayburn's son, Jim Rayburn III says his dad called church a "colossal bore and a failure" (Rayburn 1984: 62). Meredith echoes these words, stating that Rayburn had an active rebellion against traditional religious structures, due to their boring nature. Finding traditional church boring was one of the motivating factors that enabled him to be effective with young people (Meredith 1978:15). This factor, combined with the influence of Chafer's writings, instilled in Rayburn a passion to reach youth through an innovative strategy built on four divisions: contact, Club, camp, and Campaigners. Each of these were designed to be attractive and enjoyable, opening the door for the reception of the Christian message. Former Young Life leader John Miller writes:

Everything we do is done to win that hearing—to prepare kids to be receptive to what we proclaim. Everything we do in Young Life should be of the highest quality—club, skits, camps. If these are done well, that boy or girl becomes receptive to the message; especially if the messenger was in the skit or the entertainment (Miller 1991:163).

It is clear that the leaders of Young Life believed there was a connection between quality of presentation, "doing everything well", and the attractiveness of the Christian message.

4.3 Contact ministry

One of the slogans that characterized the Young Life movement was "winning the right to be heard" (Calliet 1963:62). To do this a Young Life worker needed to establish contact with a young person and build a relationship with them (Senter 2010a:220). The goal of the contact ministry was simply to spend time on a young person's turf, whether on the sporting field, at school events or in a restaurant. Through this, a relationship could be formed that would allow someone to either share with a student

the good news of Jesus or invite them to the weekly Club meeting devoted to telling young people about Jesus. The reason being, in Meredith's words, "the kids like finding someone older who is just like them but who knows a lot more about life" (Meredith 1978:11). This young person is then invited to Club where this older person, who has shown interest in them, can share with them their deeply held beliefs about Jesus Christ (Meredith 1978:11). Rayburn believed that for successful evangelism to take place, one must "gain the respect and friendship of students before expecting them to listen to the claims of Christ (Senter 1992:126).

The process of establishing contact was one of slowly gaining depth in a relationship. A casual, "shallow" friendship slowly turns into a more committed, deeper friendship where, in the end, spiritual matters could be discussed at club. Calliet describes this as a "transfer of loyalty," from shallow loyalties to true loyalty, which involves a process of "polarization" that is, a movement from one group of beliefs to another (Calliet 1963:70).

4.4 Young Life Clubs

Young Life had, at its core, a network of local youth ministry gatherings called "Club." Once contact was made, a youth was invited to the weekly club, which was the "platform" of Young Life (Meredith 1978:11). Calliet notes that Rayburn thought that church was an incomprehensible concept to the youth he was ministering to (Calliet 1963:15). With this in mind, Rayburn devised a weekly meeting, consisting of an hour of singing, comedy skits, announcements of coming activities, and a gospel message (Calliet 1963:34). He believed that it was more productive to hold these meetings at a home, rather than at school, or at a local church. The belief was that teens would feel more comfortable in a home setting (Shelley 1986:53). In addition, Rayburn believed that it was imperative to attract the leaders of the school. His idea of attractional thinking extended beyond events to attractive people themselves. Meredith comments that, "... if you can interest the leaders in the school, other kids will follow" (Meredith 1978:21). It is important to note the similarity between Young Life and Youth for Christ. Both developed a regular gathering that follows on from the evangelistic gathering.

These weekly meetings were specifically designed to be attractive to the teens that attended or could potentially attend. Calliet observes that there were various key concepts to ensure these meetings were attractive. Among these were singing and building the feeling of *esprit de corps* among the youth. These aspects were designed to "capture the attention of the indifferent long enough for a thoughtful look at the Savior" (Calliet 1963:33-34). It is clear that Rayburn valued a connection between preaching about Jesus and having a good time. Meredith quotes him as saying: "Do you stop having fun when you start talking about Jesus? If you do, God help you" (Meredith 1978:19). With regards to singing, Calliet writes

This again is more easily said than done. Right now, the lad may be hiding under the piano, miles away in thought from what will prove the whole point of the meeting. Others and their gangs may still be talking over some business of their own. Not only should they all be kept happy, but they should be brought closer together with an eye on the purpose in view. *Esprit de corps* is needed: a group mind has to be brought about (Calliet 1963:35 italics his).

With respect to building unity he says:

There is nothing like singing, possibly combined with some kind of swing, to develop oneness in a crowd. Cheerleaders are well aware of this. But the Young Life worker should not follow his own preference and start with one of the great hymns of the Christian tradition. A funny old song—better still a familiar chorus—will do the trick. Later they may pass on to something like the Battle Hymn of the Republic. By then, the boy under the piano may be crawling out, and be heard to say to a new pal, “Look at it there! Isn’t it a kick?” (Calliet 1963:35).

Rayburn’s was to bring about an atmosphere that would allow a clear transmission of the Christian message. Rather than the stifling atmosphere of traditional church, Rayburn’s hope was for an unchurched youth feel part of a group and to be in the frame of mind that was ready to listen (Calliet 1963:36). Borgman agrees, noting that the goal of this meeting was for the youth to be relaxed and happy so that they enjoyed a special meeting with Jesus of Nazareth (Borgman 1987:69.) The presupposition behind these gatherings was that if youth had an exciting and enjoyable time, they would more readily listen to the gospel.

3.4.5 Camping Ministry

One cannot discuss the influence of Young Life without an emphasis on their camping program. While the weekly club program was designed to be an enjoyable time while introducing teens to Jesus, the next step was to have them go to a week to a Young Life camp or what Rayburn called “resorts” (Rayburn 1984:73). Senter states that the weekly clubs were designed to move young people from their home context to a “fabulous resort where they would have the best week of their lives and at the same time be presented with the Christian gospel” (Senter 2010a:220). These resorts attracted non-churched youth from all over the United States of America as well as Canada and featured sports, sunshine and good fun (Calliet 1963:47). This “best week of their lives” was to be a door opening for the gospel message (Senter 2010a:220).

It is clear that this week of camping was designed to reach the goal of introducing young people to Jesus Christ through the camp experience but also through forming a bond between those youth and the leader who brought them. Calliet notes one Bob Brown bringing a group of students to camp in Canada from Southern California. While Brown “... did not know any of them well when he started out, ... traveling for three days quickly brought them all together. So much more so the prolonged camping experience and the journey back (Calliet 1963: 44). In addition, these camps provided good

food and exceptional entertainment that was designed to build an attractive platform from which to preach the gospel message (Miller 1991:161).

4.6 Campaigners and a Two-fold Strategy for Conversion and Building

Calliet states that there was a twofold strategy of winning young people and then providing them with training in another weekly gathering (Calliet 1963:50). He believed that Young Life followed the New Testament pattern of “separating the proclamation of salvation, on the one hand, from the moral and spiritual instruction of those who have already accepted the message, on the other” and cites Article II of the Young Life Constitution at the time of writing (Calliet 1963:50). This Constitution stated:

- A. To introduce the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to young people who are not personally committed to Him, particularly to the unchurched and the ex-churched.
- B. To encourage, among young people who are personally committed to Christ, the development of a spiritual life which shall manifest itself in consistent Christian virtues and activities, including loyal and active participation within the organized Church.

Calliet notes that in the New Testament there is a difference between kerygma and didache. Kerygma deals with the proclamation of the redemptive message of Jesus whereas didache deals with edifying teaching (Calliet 1963:50). He argues that this was seen in Young Life’s Campaigners ministry that, in his words, “is roughly comparable to point B in the Constitution or didache in the New Testament (Calliet 1963:50). Calliet writes that a Campaigners group, which consisted of smaller groups of Christian youth who study the Bible, pray and have fellowship together, was key to the success of Young Life as these young people were a “lifeline to other young people” (Calliet 1963:24).

4.7 The Impact of Young Life

Through the implementation of a strategy built on attraction via relationship, rousing weekly gatherings, and camps that resembled youth resorts, Young Life set a direction for youth ministry that is still in effect today. There is also a clear link between Young Life and the youth ministry strategies of the 1970s and 1980s and ultimately, the development of the Funnel model of youth ministry.

5. Wayne Rice, Mike Yaconelli and the Rise of Youth Specialties

The methodology set into place by Youth for Christ and Young Life would be taken a step further by two key youth leaders in the 1960s, Wayne Rice and Mike Yaconelli. Rice and Yaconelli, who initially worked for Youth for Christ, began their widespread influence by selling books filled with ideas for a weekly youth group gathering. The popularity of these books would lead to the formation of Youth Specialties, a company devoted to the resourcing, training and spiritual care of youth leaders

and one that would be, to the present day, a major influence in youth ministry in North America. Senter states that their “visibility, creativity, and insights in the world of youth ministry soon made them apart of a newly established power block” (Senter 2010a:251). This “power block” would come to assemble a vast collection of resources under the Youth Specialties banner, begin the National Youth Workers Convention held throughout the U.S.A., run popular one-day seminars, and produce *Youthworker*, a bi-monthly journal for youth leaders (Campolo 1989:196). Rice comments that although their business started “on a whim” it grew to “become one of the largest providers of youth ministry training and resources in the world” (Rice 2010:16).

5.1 Rice and Yaconelli’s Parachurch Background

Wayne Rice and Mike Yaconelli both had experience in parachurch ministries prior to the formation of Youth Specialties. Clark writes that Yaconelli began his youth ministry career in Youth for Christ and “loved and supported both Youth for Christ and Young Life” (Clark 2004:28). Oestreicher writes about the formation of their first *Ideas* book and states that they had “left their parachurch roles” after working with Youth for Christ (Oestreicher 2008:54). This was significant as the collection of ideas that would form their early books reflected the methodology of Youth for Christ in evangelizing young people. Rice, who was raised as a member of the Nazarene Church, spoke of his first experiences with Youth for Christ while a student in Ventura California

These rallies were unlike anything I had ever experienced at church, with a wide variety of singers, actors, athletes, magicians, ventriloquists and every other kind of Christian entertainer you could imagine. There was also spirited competitions between schools in a crazy kind of Bible quiz program featuring uniformed participants who had memorized entire books of the Bible (Rice 2010:54).

This experience would have a major impact on Rice and would be foundational in the formation and selling of his youth ministry ideas. About his experience with the weekly youth meetings of Youth for Christ, called Campus Life, he writes:

Campus Life club meetings had to appeal to a non-Christian audience. Jim Rayburn, the founder of Young Life, is well known for saying “It’s a sin to bore a kid,” but YFC in San Diego definitely took that concept to new heights. Campus Life clubs were anything but boring. They started at 7:17 p.m. (“An Unusual Time for an Unusual Program”) and featured a steady stream of crowd breakers, games, skits and crazy stunts—like the famous (or infamous) “electric chair” or “hot seat,” a wooden stool outfitted with a six-volt battery and a model-T Ford engine coil. The stool was wired to give the person sitting on it a mild electric shock that sent them flying off the seat to the applause and laughter of the audience (Rice 2010:61).

These weekly meetings were organized for youth who did not regularly attend a Christian gathering. He describes them as clubs that “didn’t sound religious and they didn’t look religious” as they were programmed entirely for nonchurched kids (Rice 2010:60). Furthermore, the “fun” ideas that were the backbone of the weekly meeting were designed to attract a young person and open a door for them to

hear the gospel message. Rice notes that the “big idea behind them was to provide a nonthreatening environment that would attract non-Christian kids and keep them hanging around long enough hear the gospel” (Rice 2010:62).

In Rice’s Youth for Christ experience, anything that was entertaining could be used to attract young people. Leaders used a variety of entertaining skills music, including stand-up comedy, magic, and ventriloquism. All of these were to “have more tricks of the trade at their disposal for keeping kids’ attention” (Rice 2010:63). Rice’s experience, along with Yaconelli, was built on the understanding that youth ministry was all about “finding ways to reach unchurched teens with the good news about Jesus” (Rice 2010:64). This necessitated, in their minds, the need for attractive, entertaining program ideas.

In seeking to understand Rice and Yaconelli’s impact, especially the impact of their *Ideas* books, it is important to see that in Rice’s writings is the belief that evangelism is the top priority in youth ministry. He states: “My job as youth worker (as I understood it at least) was to attract non-Christian kids and lead them to Christ. That’s what I did in Youth for Christ and that’s what I assumed my role in the church would be as well” (Rice 2010:31).

Reflecting a similar view to Jim Rayburn, Rice believed that the church was weak when it came to reaching youth and he believed that it was his job to “turn a small youth group into a large one” (Rice 2010:31). For Rice, a key characteristic of evangelical youth ministry was to make Christianity appealing to young people (Rice 2010:67) and to organize youth ministry in a way that used attractive, entertaining program segments to reach the unchurched youth.

I think we just assumed that most people shared the same ministry philosophy that we had at the beginning—which was to reach teenagers for Christ by creating exciting and interesting youth group meetings and activities. All of the ideas we published were designed with that purpose in mind—from Chubby Bunny to the World’s Largest Pillow Fight. We wanted to put on events that kids would tell their friends about and look forward to attending week after week (Rice 2010:99).

In order to understand the impact of Rice and Yaconelli one must understand their connection to what is called “ideas.” These ideas are simply youth group activities that they had learned as Youth for Christ workers and then made available for the first time in written form for the local church. Senter calls these ideas “their commodities” as they made an immediate impact and proved financially profitable at the same time (Senter 2010a:251). These ideas were designed to be helpful to the youth leader giving them activities that were tried and tested and proven attractive to teens.

Early in their respective ministries Rice and Yaconelli both decided independently of one other to leave Youth for Christ and finish their university degrees. During this time, they contacted each other and agreed to put together a book of these Youth for Christ ideas for a broader audience. Rice states

that their first effort was simply a collection of single-sided and three-hole punched papers placed in notebooks. The effort was simple and inexpensive with youth from their youth groups helping to collate them (Rice 2010:90). They produced one hundred books and sold them for five dollars a piece at the Southern California Youth Workers Fellowship meeting at Forest Home Conference Center in California. Clark notes that the reception to their first book was extremely positive. In his words, “it was such a hit that they quickly put together *Ideas*, vol. 2_ (Clark 2004:27 italics his). This was sold at a booth at the Greater Los Angeles Sunday School Convention which they again, sold every copy they printed (Rice 2010:91). Senter notes that with this printing of the follow-up book *Ideas No.2, Youth Specialties* was born (Senter 1992:148).

It was obvious to Rice and Yaconelli that not only were these resources a way to supplement their income, but there was a youth ministry need as well. Clark comments that they “had struck a nerve—youth ministry people are desperate for ideas that help their ministry to be fun” (Clark 2004:27). Soon there were several *Ideas* books released by Rice and Yaconelli and by the following year (1970) there were four *Ideas* books in print (Senter 1992:149).

These books followed a similar pattern designed to be of immediate help to a leader of a youth group. There were a number of sections such as ice-breakers, big group events, discussion starter, skits, and talks (Wilson 2004:33). Rice states that the books each had six chapters: crowd breakers and stunts, games and group participation stunts, publicity ideas, special events, contests, and skits (Rice 2010:89). What took place from all of this was a transfer of the methodology from the parachurch into the church. As Senter states, these ideas had once been the “domain of the parachurch agencies” and Rice and Yaconelli gave every church worker in the nation access to them (Senter 1992:149). The result was, in Senter’s words, “a rapid and broad distribution of parachurch ministry technology to people who were more interested in methods for keeping students active in youth groups than in full-cycle discipleship” (Senter 1992:149). Wilson comments that these ideas books were “was nothing short of the first organized collection of resources for ministering to teenagers that the world had ever seen” (Wilson 2004:33).

Rice, reflecting back on the experience, notes that these ideas were so valuable for a number of reasons. In his words, “In both YFC and the church, my job as a youth director was to conjure up enough youth ministry bells and whistles to keep teenagers interested and coming back for more. That required lots of new ideas. You couldn’t just keep doing the same thing over and over again (Rice 2010:95-96). Rice points out that these *Ideas* books were not about youth ministry strategy, they were simply ideas to help youth leaders. This led to them forming a policy statement:

We are dedicated to servicing the church. We believe that modern programming techniques open the way to new dimensions of youth ministry. Our aim is to provide functional creative

techniques both to the experienced and inexperienced that they may create youth program that is effective. Our purpose is to use programming as a means of communication that will reach an otherwise unreachable young person (Rice 2010:88).

It is interesting to note that Rice saw these ideas as a way to reach the “unreachable kids”. These were the youth, in his words, who found church “boring and irrelevant” (Rice 2010 89). This is what they did in Youth for Christ and he believed was what the local church should engage in as well (Rice 2010 89). There is a parallel here between Rice’s Youth for Christ experience and the formation of Young Life. Rice, like Jim Rayburn decades earlier, was eager to remove any stigma of church being uninteresting or dull. In Rice’s mind, these ideas would be the factor that would bridge the gap for unchurched youth to hear the gospel.

5.2 Ideas and the Use of Entertainment to Attract the Unchurched

It is clear that Rice and Yaconelli shared similar views on the use of entertainment to reach the unchurched as Youth for Christ. Rice comments that one of Youth for Christ’s mottos was “Anchored to the Rock, Geared to the Times” this, in his words meant that while the message would never change, the methods were always “up for grabs” (Rice 2010:59). This required that the “fun” methods must change according to culture, however, fun as a means to attract youth to hear the gospel would always be a valid concept.

Rice notes that he himself does not make a distinction between “worldly fun and secular fun.” Saying:

... we had a philosophy of youth ministry that didn’t make a distinction between Christian fun and regular fun, the sacred and the secular. It was all the same to us. If fun was being had by Christians, then it was Christian fun. It didn’t need a Bible verse or a lesson to go with it (Rice 2010:99).

Yaconelli also believed that fun was a key element to youth ministry. He comments are enlightening, “Fun is good, too. Very good. Young people have very few places where they’re encouraged to have fun. Students should spend a lot of their childhood laughing. Youth ministry helps young people rediscover genuine laughter and fun (Yaconelli 2008:92).”

Rice and Yaconelli’s impact on modern youth ministry in North America cannot be overstated. Cusick claims that the impact of Youth Specialties is immense servicing over 70,000 organizations, including the YMCA, Boy Scouts of America, The United States Air Force, the Salvation Army, and thousands of churches (Cusick 1995:67). One writer has called their influence “staggering, impacting hundreds

of thousands of youth leaders all across the globe” (Webster 2003) with another claiming that “Youth Specialties not only changed youth ministry but created modern youth ministry as we know it (Jones 2009).

Working with the parachurch methodology that Rice and Yaconelli learned from Youth for Christ, it is easy to see their connection to the earlier ministries of Youth for Christ in the 1940s and 1950s and the ministry of Rayburn’s Young Life. Utilizing culturally relevant and youth-friendly programming ideas, they continued what Youth for Christ and Young Life started. Chap Clark credits the influence of Mike Yaconelli as the major reason he believes that “play, fun, and humor are essential aspects of youth ministry” (Clark 2004:27).

6. Duffy Robbins and the Funnel Model of Youth Ministry

It is evident from the study of Youth for Christ, Young Life, and Youth Specialties that their strategy was to focus on reaching those outside of the church rather than building up those inside. Similarly, it is clear that there was no connection in their thinking of mission and identity—that who we are must be linked to what we do. These groups are built on the principle that what is used to reach the unchurched must be relevant to *them*, attractive, and bring them to a setting where they have can hear a message that gives them the opportunity to respond with faith. Duffy Robbins, formerly of Eastern University in Pennsylvania, now teaches at Grove City College and, as of 2018, is a forty year veteran of youth ministry. Robbins is widely known in North America for his writing and youth ministry workshops and is the author of a number of books and articles and is the proponent of the youth ministry structure called the Funnel. Clark argues that Robbins is “perhaps the greatest youth ministry influencer of the 1980s and ‘90s” (Clark 2001:112). Clark states that the Funnel is “not a model per se” but rather it is focusing on “strategic categories of ministry” (Clark 2001:112). These different categories are designed to move a youth from a life with no relationship to Jesus Christ to someone who is actively engaged in the evangelization of others. Robbins sees the funnel as a “blueprint” for youth ministry that will “accomplish the purpose for which it was built” (Robbins 1991:70).



Figure 0.1 The Funnel Model

It is interesting to note that Robbins had his start in an evangelistic parachurch mission “whose primary vision and focus was to reach out to unchurched high school students” (Robbins 2004:476). His goal was to develop relationships with students who did not know him (Robbins 2004:476). He was also a part of the Youth Specialties creative team of trainers (Senter 2010a:301) and has written four books on youth ministry that specifically lay out the funnel of youth ministry: *Nuts and Bolts of Youth Ministry* (1990), *Youth Ministry that Works* (1991), *This Way to Youth Ministry* (2004), and, *Building a Youth Ministry that Builds Disciples* (2011).

Robbins is clearly building on and formalizing work that has preceded him. In *Nuts and Bolts of Youth Ministry*, Robbins notes that he was building on the work of Larry Richards

Larry Richards recommends evaluating a youth ministry by a model that defines goals in three key areas of the youth-ministry program Bible, life and body. Using Richards’ approach, we evaluate group needs and design program goals based on three key questions: Where are our students weak in understanding biblical truth? Are our students able to work biblical truth into the fabric of their everyday lives? Are our students living out kingdom relationships—are they being the body of Christ? Designing specific objectives based on these questions, youth leaders can evaluate how effectively their youth program is moving the group in the desired direction (Robbins 1990:108).

Robbins’ concern is to help youth ministers to evaluate the effectiveness of a youth ministry program, and to structure a youth ministry in a way that it meets the goals set out for this program. He believes that youth ministry must reflect the call of Jesus in Luke 14:28-30 and finish what we set out to build (Robbins 2011:108). It is his main concern that youth ministry not only seeks to reach young people by telling them the gospel but also moves them into a dedicated process whereby they grow as a disciple of Jesus and to then become one who reaches others, thereby continuing the process.

In addition to Larry Richards, Robbins’ early work on the funnel is an adaption of a youth ministry concept that had been taught previously by Dennis Miller (Robbins 1990:108). This funnel consists of a wide mouth, designed to bring youth in, with intentional programming that is built on a growing

level of Christian commitment as it narrows and is designed to accomplish your objectives (Robbins 1990:108).

6.1 Proponents of the Funnel Model

While no one appears to be certain when the idea of the funnel shape for designing a youth ministry program was created, it has certainly been in circulation as a key strategic option for decades with a number of high-profile proponents. Mike Yaconelli and Jim Burns proposed a similar model three years before Robbins' *Youth Ministry Nuts and Bolts* (Yaconelli and Burns 1986:115). Yaconelli and Burns presented this funnel and stated that the origins of this understanding of ministry are unknown (Yaconelli and Burns 1986:113). In their funnel, they have six levels of spiritual commitment. These are the Student Population in General, Come and See, Grow, Disciple, Develop, and Multiplication (Yaconelli and Burns 1986:114 capitalization theirs). It is interesting to note that Yaconelli and Burns write that the top of the funnel must be "easy to enter the program and easy to get out" and that as you get deeper into the funnel, more commitment is required (Yaconelli and Burns 1986:116). Like Robbins, they believe that as commitment increases, attendance decreases (Yaconelli and Burns 1986:116). As per Robbins, Burns believes that the events at the entry level must be enticing to a young person. He writes: "Students like to be in the middle of a happening. For a number of years, organizations such Youth for Christ and other parachurch organizations have shown us that Non-Christian young people will come to special events if we are willing to put the time into making it a significant experience for them" (Burns 2001:86).

6.2 Willow Creek Community Church

Bo Boshers, who was the Director of Student Impact at the highly influential Willow Creek Community Church in Illinois, also views youth ministry as a funnel. The top of the funnel seeks to attract and reach the seeker, or person who does not yet know Jesus. The goal of the funnel is to have different programming elements that "draw students closer to the message of Christ" (Boshers 1997:227). He cites various friendly competitions where youth are involved as a place where walls begin to come down allowing unchurched youth to interact with each other and to more readily hear about Jesus (Boshers 1997:230-231). Reflecting common Willow Creek vernacular, he writes that "seekers" (non-Christians) will come away from a youth event thinking "Wow I'm actually having fun" and, "this was pretty good" (Boshers 1997:231). Senter comments on this program as a ministry with "wacky competition events in order to attract teenagers to the seeker events" (Senter 1997:115).

6.3 Saddleback Community Church

In the twenty-first century, the Funnel Model continues to shape youth ministry strategy. Kurt Johnston, leader of the Junior High School Ministry at Saddleback Community Church, a well-known and influential megachurch in Southern California, also has a variation of the funnel. He uses a similar geometric shape but breaks youth spirituality into the categories of Care Less, Curious, Caught, Committed, and Contagious (Johnston 2001:81). While he may have different names for these levels, he agrees with Robbins that different levels will appeal to different students, and this should be promoted. He writes:

It is perfectly fine to say to students, “This program may not be right for you yet, but let me tell you about one that is.” The neat thing about identifying the students in your area is that it not only helps you identify where they are now, but it provides a goal of where you hope to take them. It also determines what programs can best meet their needs (Johnston 2001:81-82).

Johnston has a moderately different view from Robbins on the primary purposes of each level. He believes that you seek to evangelize the Care Less, provide worship experiences for the Curious, have fellowship for the Caught, disciple the Committed, and design ministry opportunities for the Contagious. This pattern is clearly a reflection of Rick Warren’s Purpose Driven Ministry where Warren breaks down the five “purposes” of ministry into the categories of worship, ministry, evangelism, fellowship, and discipleship (Warren 1995:103-106).

6.4 Blaine Bartel

Blaine Bartel, who founded the influential 180 Ministry in the United States, breaks up youth into categories that are analogous to an American football game (Bartel 2002:64-65). There are community students who live in the city and may or may not have heard that there is a game going on. There are the casual fans that are in the cheaper seats and are not committed to the football team. There are the season ticket holders who “bring their Bibles and participate in the worship service” (Bartel 2002:65). Finally, there are the players who are totally involved and committed.

6.5 Sonlife Ministries

Dann Spader, who was the director of the Sonlife Ministries in Chicago, Illinois has a similar view of evangelism. He breaks down youth into the categories of Fun Seeker, Curious, Convinced, and Committed. The movement is similar to other youth ministry writers, with a movement from someone simply seeking a good time, to the student who is committed to ministering to others (Spader 1987:227). Spader believes that “our goal should be to build a discipling ministry adapted to students at various levels of personal growth and development (Spader 1987:227).

6.6 Australian Reflections of the Funnel

The funnel Model of youth ministry has also attracted advocates from overseas. John Kidson was the Consultant Youth Worker with the Anglican Youth Department in Sydney Australia and the author of the booklet *Brass Tacks*. In this booklet, he describes the funnel Principle, where a youth leader begins with a nucleus of committed members and then seeks to see unchurched youth join via activities at the mouth of the funnel designed to attract such as a pool party or rock concert (Kidson 1987:36-37). He describes the mouth as “maximum number of people, minimum amount of overt Christian message” (Kidson 1987:35). Kidson also reflects the common sentiment that increased spiritual commitment is concomitant with lessening numbers stating, “As the Christian content becomes more obvious the attendance will probably drop off” (Kidson 1987:35).

Australian Tim Hawkins promotes a minimized version of the funnel advocating a three-step strategy of Bringing In, Building Up and finally, Sending Out (Hawkins 1999:98). Hawkins describes his meeting designed for the Bringing In segment of his strategy as a place with skating equipment, a basketball ring, a room devoted to a dance party, a room with computer games, a “snack shack” and a pool room (Hawkins 1999:145-146). The aim, in Hawkins’ words, is for the place to be “alive and happening from the word go,” with the program presented in a high-energy way so the newcomer is happy to be there (Hawkins 1999:147).

Ross Farley is a former Australian Youth for Christ worker who also advocates a model like a funnel in youth ministry. He offers a simplified version of three levels: Contact, Evangelism, and Teaching (Farley 1991:28). He believes that Christians are often unaware that we have a subculture that can be tough for the unchurched to enter into (Farley 1991:28). Therefore, we must seek to facilitate their entry into a Christian youth group through contact events (level one). These activities are designed to attract newcomers and also to consolidate the relationships that have already been made (Farley 1991:30). Farley suggests that activities appropriate for this level are dances, games nights, talent shows and barbeques (Farley 1991:41). Level two is where evangelism takes place. This should be a fun program with significant evangelistic input (Farley 1991:31). Level three is for the development of young people through more serious spiritual activities such as Bible study and prayer. Farley echoes Kidson by stating that the number of youth who attend will lessen as they move through the three circles (Farley 1991:33).

7. Duffy Robbins Funnel and the Strategy of Dennis Miller’s

Dennis Miller is a Minnesota based youth minister and consultant involved in church and parachurch youth ministry (Miller 1988:iii). He is the author of several books and training manuals and desires to “create and sustain ministries that measure their success by changes in individual lives” (Miller

1988:iii). His model of youth ministry is expounded in two books: *Working with Youth: A Handbook for the 80s* (1982), and *Changing Lives* (1988). In these texts he sets out a pyramid based on five areas of ministry stating that “students grow in individual rates” and therefore trying to build one ministry to deal with all the students’ needs will be “an exercise in frustration” (Miller 1982:20). He advocates developing an environment where each student is ministered to at their own level of spiritual commitment with the encouragement to urge them on to a deeper level (Miller 1982:20).

There is a slight differentiation of nomenclature of the levels between Miller’s earlier work and his later work. However, the basic philosophy is the same; in both, Miller offers five levels of commitment that one will find when working with youth (Miller 1988:187). At each of these levels will be a ministry with activities designed to meet the needs of youth at a specific spiritual level. By structuring a ministry around these five levels, a youth leader will stop running unrelated activities that will not help to promote spiritual growth (Miller 1988:187). This five-level environment, in Miller’s words, “allows for students with varying levels of spiritual commitment to cooperate with the Holy Spirit” (Miller 1988:217).

In Miller’s earlier work, he breaks the five levels into the categories of Pool of Humanity, Outreach, Growth, Leadership, and, Multiplication (Miller 1982:20). There appears to be some development in Miller’s thinking. In his later model, which resembles a tiered wedding cake rather than a funnel, the five levels are: Decide to Associate, Become Involved, Decide to Change, Aspire to Lead, and, Commit to Multiply (Miller 1988:188). One can see the main difference between his earlier model and later model in the first two levels. In his later model, he has replaced the category of the Pool of Humanity level and renamed it Decide to Associate level. This bypasses the group that exists simply in your neighborhood (Pool of Humanity) and instead targets those youth who would be interested in coming to the youth group. This new level of Decide to Associate is the precursor to Robbins’ Come Level. Here youth come to make contact with the youth ministry with a bare minimum of spiritual input involved. In Miller’s early work, his first level of ministry is the outreach level where youth will “come and listen to what is being said about the Gospel” (Miller 1982:20). We will see in Miller’s later work that the first level (Associate) has no clear gospel declaration to the students.

7.1 Level 1: Decide to Associate

This level consists of the numerous youth who live in your city and who could be ministered to by a youth leader. To facilitate association, the youth leader must purposefully plan to associate with students in activities such as school concerts or plays, sporting events and any other activity where students are gathered (Miller 1988:189). The goal is to develop personal relationships with students who are unchurched or do not attend the youth group. In Miller’s words, this level is not “a level at which aggressive relational evangelism is done”. Instead, you run these events to demonstrate your

love for students with this as the first step for them to begin to trust you enough to listen to your message (Miller 1988:189). Miller suggests that a good way to associate with students is to discover a significant need and then decide to try and fill this need (Miller 1988:190). He gives an example of providing soccer jerseys for a boy's team in a school that could not afford them (Miller 1988:190). This demonstrates your love for them and could possibly lead to, in his words, "meaningful involvements with new students" (Miller 1988:190).

7.2 Level 2: Become Involved

This level is designed to attract young people to events where they are willing to come to an event and listen to an evangelistic talk. The commitment level of youth at this stage is merely to attend the activity on offer, participate in this activity and then be willing to listen to a Christian message (Miller 1988:191). Miller also calls this the "Involvement Level" and says that students at this level are not ready to take action on any truths they are taught, they are simply there to enjoy the activity and listen to the message (Miller 1988:192). The job of the youth leader, he says, is to provide activities for students who "simply want to attend," these students do not attend an event with the goal of spiritual development or to "seriously change spiritually" (Miller 1988:191). Appropriate activities for this level are church services, Sunday School, sports clinics, and evangelistic Bible studies (Miller 1988:191). This level is also designed, according to Miller, to create a thirst in students to discover more about Jesus (Miller 1988:195). In addition, Miller sees this level as promoting a movement away from a "secular humanistic lifestyle to a Christian, God-dependent one" (Miller 1988:195).

Miller suggests that youth leaders need to be culturally relevant when thinking through activities and especially how we communicate with teens (Miller 1988:195). Youth leaders must use words and phrases that are familiar to unbelievers (Miller 1988:195). In addition to this, Miller suggests that youth leaders be "aggressive" when speaking to nonChristian students about Christ. It is important to note that he does not use this term to mean "offensive" but rather there should be a deliberate attempt to initiate a conversation with someone about Jesus (Miller 1988:195).

7.3 Level 3: Decide to Change

This level is the "Change Level" and it is here that students attend and are willing to change spiritually (Miller 1988:197). With this in mind, a youth leader must develop programs that will facilitate this spiritual change. Not only is there a willingness to change, but Miller says there must also be a commitment on a youth's part to attend weekly meetings, to study and apply the Bible, and to explain to others their desire to follow God (Miller 1988:197). Appropriate activities for the Change Level are retreats, small groups, and advanced Bible studies (Miller 1988:197).

It is interesting to note that in Miller's levels the student themselves decide when to move to a deeper level. If a youth leader has students at the Involvement Level but believes they may be ready to attend a Change Level activity, you organize this new activity and let the youth know that it is on. The students then can decide whether "they are willing to take risks" and come to this new activity that is a deeper level of spiritual growth and commitment (Miller 1988:202). If students are unwilling to seek growth and spiritual development, that is fine, they can stay at the Involvement Level. Miller suggests that it may be necessary to use a "bit of salt" to make young people thirsty for a new level of spiritual commitment (Miller 1988:203). This means that a youth leader must involve youth in an activity that may raise questions or create the desire for answers or a deeper spiritual experience. He gives the example of a youth group where the youth leader felt that his teaching program was not having any impact on the students. In Miller's words, the youth were "bored" and "gorged" on the spiritual truths that they knew already (Miller 1988:204). To create thirst, the youth leader organized a ministry to mentally challenged children and had the youth group participate. Miller writes, "This salting activity made the students thirsty. Salting is vitally important if you desire to make more than a casual impact on your students' lives. Often when students are involved in serving others, they experience their own need of help and training" (Miller 1988:204).

7.4 Level 4: Aspire to Lead

Miller refers to this level as the "Leadership Level" and this next level is concerned with training and allowing the youth themselves to undertake some degree of leadership in ministering to others. Youth at this level, according to Miller have made the commitment to strive for Christian learning, to engage in ministry, and to help others do the same (Miller 1988:210).

7.5 Level 5: Commit to Multiply

This last level is the "Multiplication Level" and dedicated to equipping those student leaders who are leading other students. Miller believes that this level will only be reached by a small number of people as the standards and commitments are extremely high (Miller 1988:215). This level is concerned with the selection and nurture of student leaders and the planning and execution of ministry events. It is Miller's opinion that the group will grow numerically when students are able to pass on spiritual truths to fellow students (Miller 1988:216).

7.6 The Goal of the Funnel

Miller summarizes this understanding of youth ministry by pointing out that these levels with all their various activities are not designed for judgment, rather it is a "device to help you understand exactly what you are expecting of the students in your ministry and exactly how to challenge them to be involved in the activities you provide" (Miller 1998:218). In addition, Miller believes that no level is more important than any other when it comes to the value of the participant (Miller 1988:218). We

will see that Duffy Robbins' funnel is designed with the same understanding of what a model of ministry must accomplish, that is, the creation of a formula that will minister to various students at their own spiritual level and move them deeper towards Christian maturity.

The goal of the five levels, according to Miller is to provide a different motivation when planning various activities (Miller 1988:218). Each activity that you plan will have a specific goal, with a specific audience in mind. It will also make leadership easier and all involved will understand what is expected at an event and can be prepared to respond appropriately. In addition, leaders will provide activities specifically for each youth who is involved in their program. It is interesting to note that Miller believes that one activity may incorporate all levels. He gives the example of a social where Association Level students simply come, Involvement Level students come and can observe someone sharing their testimony with another person, Change Level students can use the social as an opportunity to share their testimony with another person, Leadership Level students show some Change Level students how to share their testimony, and Multiplication Level students lead the event (Miller 1998:219).

As we move to focus on Robbins' funnel model of ministry, we will see a clear relationship between his work and the work of Miller.

8. Duffy Robbins and the Funnel as a Blueprint for Evaluation

Duffy Robbins' funnel was developed as a blueprint to help youth leaders specifically address the spiritual needs and development of youth at varying levels of Christian commitment. Robbins believes that the funnel assists a youth leader to evaluate the effectiveness of their program in a number of ways: it helps leaders to see if youth are moving from one level of spiritual maturity to the next, and, it helps a youth leader assemble a program that meets the specific needs of a target audience. The first way it helps the effectiveness of a program is by giving youth leaders some way of evaluating where your students are at spiritually. In his understanding, having specific objectives broken into various categories allows the youth leader to evaluate successfully if their ministry is reaching the goals it is designed for. In his words:

Part of our sacred responsibility in youth ministry is careful evaluation and reevaluation to make sure that we are building programs that accomplish the purposes for which they were designed. We simply cannot afford power plants that can't light the darkness (Robbins 1990:112).

The second way is by enabling the youth leaders to develop programs that directly address the particular needs of a target audience. Robbins says:

Essentially, what this diagram does for us is help us evaluate and develop our youth ministry programs by showing us the kinds of students our programs are addressed to. Looking at the

diagram, we need to think of each of the levels of the pyramid as representing students at varying levels of Christian commitment. (Robbins 1991:73)

The funnel also helps to show a youth leader where one part of the program needs more energy or effort.

The necessity of this evaluation is that it exposes where a particular youth program is overweight and where it is underweight, for what kinds of students programming has been sufficient, and, perhaps, what levels of commitment have been inadvertently ignored. This is where the hard decisions of person-oriented ministry are played out. This is where the calling impacts the calendar, where mission meets ministry, where purpose shapes program (Robbins 2004:505).

As you evaluate the success of your ministry or an activity therein, Robbins urges that you ask two questions in relation to commitment: “Which of our activities minister to students at the various levels of commitment? And, which students do we have at the various levels of commitment (Robbins 1990:109)?

Robbins addresses the lack of form after function that, in his view, troubles many youth programs, and hinders the achievement of results that are beneficial to the youth ministry and to the overall church. He cites the need to base our youth ministries and activities on meeting the actual needs of the students we minister to. In his earliest work, he states: “We in the church have a bad habit of scratching where nobody itches. Youth workers sometimes fall into that same trap of doing youth ministry based more on programs, habits, expectations, or seasons than on student needs” (Robbins 1990:114).

Robbins, in two of his texts, notes three building projects in the U.S.A. that proved to be nonfunctional after building (Robbins 1991:69, 2011:107-108). He then points the reader to Jesus’ teaching in Luke 14:28-30 as a warning for youth leaders to build wisely (Robbins 1991:70, 2011:108). This teaching from Jesus warns the listener that if you are building a tower you must make sure you have enough money to finish it. If you do not, you will be ridiculed. In the same way that we are warned by Jesus to “finish building the tower,” Robbins warns us that:

We continue to spend astronomical amounts of time, money, and energy on programs and structures so that we can say, “It’s the largest ever built,” but half the time the finished product cannot even be used. We are building power plants that don’t deliver power—and that’s not funny (Robbins 1991:70).

Robbins urges the reader to strongly consider what “blueprint” they have for building their program as it must accomplish the purpose for which it was built (Robbins 1991:70). Ultimately, Robbins argues that the funnel will be a tool for evaluating the success or failure of a youth ministry in terms of meeting the goals that have been established for it (Robbins 2011:143). Therefore, the funnel is not

merely a model for the formation of activities for youth ministry, rather it is a tool for evaluating success or failure as well.

8.1 Levels of the Funnel

Robbins' funnel model of youth ministry is built on five different levels, each one narrower than the first. At the mouth of the funnel are Come Level activities designed to attract youth who are "not into God at all" (Robbins 2011:129). The other levels are designed to intentionally move a student to spiritual maturity. While Robbins will refer to this model as a funnel, he will first speak of it as a pyramid. In Robbins words, "the way to understand the pyramid illustration, with its various levels of commitment, is to imagine the pyramid being turned upside down and taking on the shape of a funnel" (Robbins 1991:79).

Each level of the pyramid represents youth at various levels of Christian commitment, the higher up the pyramid, the higher the level of commitment (Robbins 1991:73). Conversely, when it is reversed to be a funnel, the lower levels signify deeper spiritual commitment. Robbins believes that for a youth ministry to be balanced, it needs to have a variety of activities designed for various levels of spiritual commitment and the funnel accomplishes this. In his words:

For a youth program to be well rounded, and balanced in its scope, accomplishing the purpose for which it was designed, *there must be some type of formal or informal programming that targets the needs of kids at each of these levels of commitment.* There will be Come Level activities, geared to the student who is "not into God at all," but there will also be programs that intentionally motivate the forward progress and spiritual development of students at the Grow, Disciple, and Develop Levels" (Robbins 2011:129 italics his).

8.2 The Pool of Humanity

The first level consists of what Robbins calls, the "Pool of Humanity." This level is clearly based on the early work of Miller and is made up of the teenage population within a youth ministry's geographical sphere of influence (Robbins 1991:74). It is the youth within a geographical area that a youth leader can attempt to reach (Robbins 2011:118). These are youth who are not yet involved in the youth group; they are simply the whole number of youth that a ministry could attempt to reach. These youth, according to Robbins, are probably not even aware that a youth ministry exists. However, the youth leader must be aware of them (Robbins 2004:500). To reach this group, Robbins urges careful exegesis of the local culture (Robbins 2004:500) and serious thought to socioeconomic factors and ethnicity (Robbins 1991:119). The goal is to develop a program that is unique to this "pool." Robbins refers to a palm tree and notes that while it may grow in one climate, it will suffer in another. It is the same in ministry, as Robbins states, "If we want to see a fruitful harvest, we'll have to give attention to our peculiar ministry environment" (Robbins 2011:119). This will influence the activities and program of the Come Level, which is designed to attract youth from this group (Robbins 1991:75).

8.3 The Come Level

Young people who are at this level may not have any real commitment to Christianity but, in Robbins' words, have a strong commitment to having a good time (Robbins 1991:75). Therefore, youth at this level will only come to the group if it is doing something they find fun or entertaining (Robbins 1991:75). This level, according to Robbins, is where the majority of young people are at spiritually (Robbins 1991:75). In his words, "if we only program for the spiritual heavyweights, we are going to touch the lives of very few kids" (Robbins 1991:75).

Robbins acknowledges that for some youth, an invitation to a youth gathering that focuses on deeper spiritual practices such as prayer and communion will be effective (Robbins 2011:19). However, he believes that to attract the majority of youth to a Christian youth program you need something else. Robbins uses the fictional illustration of Jon, who "does not have any real commitment to Christ, but does have a strong commitment to having a good time" (Robbins 2004:500). He believes that every youth ministry has students like Jon who will only come when it is doing something that he likes, something that is fun or entertaining (Robbins 2004:502).

Robbins acknowledges that Come Level activities have an inbuilt limitation. Youth who attend this activity are not making any commitment or promise for anything more than to attend that activity or program. Furthermore, this is not a problem but rather it is an opportunity according to Robbins. The very fact that they are there gives hope as it gives us the opportunity for ministry (Robbins 2011:120). Robbins states

Come Level kids, when they attend an activity, are not promising they will worship, sing, pray or study the Bible. They are promising to be there as long as we have what they like. We need to welcome them on those terms. If they are not "fitting in" with what the group is doing, that may be the group's fault, not the students'. That's what it means to make a Come Level activity truly an activity for Come Level kids (Robbins 1991:88).

One of the key elements to Robbins' model, and especially at the Come Level part of this model is, what he calls, the "importance of the unspiritual" (Robbins 2004:510). This is where "unspiritual" activities can be used to bring about spiritual results. Robbins uses examples such as skiing or playing Frisbee as an example of an unspiritual activity. His belief is that in order to transition youth who may not be inclined to spiritual things into young people who are spiritually mature necessitates the use of an "unspiritual" activity that will then lead them into some degree of Christian spiritual maturity. Robbins states " ... in the right program environment, even the "unspiritual" activities have very legitimate spiritual goals. Or, to say it another way: Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is something unspiritual" (Robbins 2011:141-142).

In Robbins' mind, the Come Level activity, which, on the first examination, appears to be not a spiritual one, actually is deeply spiritual since it builds relationships and breaks down the defenses of the unchurched youth in attendance (Robbins 2004:512). Robbins states what seems to be a logical impossibility saying, "Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is something unspiritual" (Robbins 2011:142). The use of "unspiritual" activities and events will play a major role in attracting the unchurched to the mouth of the funnel.

8.4 The Grow Level

The next level of Robbins' funnel is the Grow Level. This level consists of students who are willing to engage in some degree of spiritual activities, this is what differentiates the youth at this level from those at the Come Level (Robbins 2004:502). These young people will involve themselves in activities with spiritual input, however, they may not be committed to spiritual growth (Robbins 1991:76). The key idea is that they are willing to be in an environment where spiritual growth takes place (Robbins 2011:121). They themselves may not be desirous of spiritual growth, but they will be with others who are. The effort on the young person's part at this level is generally passive, they agree to simply be there (Robbins 1991:76). In fact, they may only be there because they are attracted to the opposite sex, according to Robbins (Robbins 2011:121). The important thing is, they are there, and they are willing to be in this part of the program where the Bible is taught or an evangelistic message is given. It is important, according to Robbins, that thought is given to this message, as this is the level of the funnel where evangelism intentionally takes place. Therefore it is important that the Bible studies "incite interest, invoke active participation and equip students with the tools for taking responsibility for their own spiritual growth" (Robbins 1991:77). It is also imperative that one does not mistake their presence with their interest. The program at this level must work to meet them where they are, and then open up interest and the desire to go deeper spiritually (Robbins 2011:123). We see a similarity here with Miller's desire to "use a bit of salt to make young people thirsty".

8.5 The Disciple Level

Once a youth has been involved in the Grow Level, the goal is for them to move on to the next level, which Robbins calls the Disciple Level. The characteristic of students in this level is they are willing to take the initiative for their own spiritual growth (Robbins 2011:123).

8.6 The Develop Level

The penultimate level is the Develop Level. The youth at this level will take the initiative not only for their spiritual growth but for the growth of others as well (Robbins 1991:78). As youth mature spiritually, they will begin to look toward the spiritual growth of others. Robbins says, "In short, they are willing to own the responsibility of spiritual reproduction" (Robbins 2004:502).

8.7 The Multiply Level

The final level is the Multiplier Level. The students at this level are at the place of spiritual commitment and depth where they seek to replenish the pyramid and reproduce it in the lives of those they come into contact with (Robbins 1991:78-79). Robbins cites the example of the Apostle Paul who “multiplied himself by pouring his life and faith and vision into Timothy” (Robbins 2011:126).

8.8 Robbins’ Law of Spiritual Commitment

Robbins’ model of youth ministry is shaped like a funnel due to the decrease in numbers as they move from the Come Level to the Multiply Level. In fact, in Robbins’ view, there is a necessary connection between the number of youth who attend a program/level and the required spiritual commitment. He refers to this as the Law of Spiritual Commitment and simply means that when a youth leader tries to go deeper (spiritually) attendance drops off (Robbins 2011:139). He writes:

As commitment increases, attendance decreases. This was true of Jesus’ ministry and it will be true of ours. Five thousand people came out to get fed by Jesus (Matthew 14:14-21) but how many of those 5,000 followed Jesus into Jerusalem and Golgotha when opposition grew stronger and risks became greater? (Robbins 1991:81).

Robbins cites Biblical support for this noting that there were five thousand at the miracle of the fish and bread (Matt 14:14-21), seventy who went out in pairs (Luke 10:1-17), the appointed twelve disciples (Mark 3:14), and inner circle of Peter, James, and John (Matt 17:1), and only one disciple was cited by name as being at the cross (John 19:26). The lessening numbers of youth who attend are, in fact why the funnel is shaped like a funnel and not a rectangle or another shape.

Robbins points out that just because there are more youth at a certain level does not mean that this activity or level is more important. In fact, he does just the opposite saying that mere numbers can be a deceptive criteria (Robbins 1991:81) and, in reality, the levels lower down the funnel may be a “much more vital part of the youth ministry environment” than the wider levels above it (Robbins 2011:139).

9. Theological Reflections on the Current State of Youth Ministry in Light of Our History: Pete Ward, Andy Root, and Kenda Creasy Dean

Jacobson encourages a fourfold process of reflection in practical theology with the second process being exploration. This is the “information stage” where one assesses what is happening from both a theological perspective as well as “other areas of revelation” (Jacobson 2011:45). When reflecting on the history of youth ministry, Dean bemoans the fact that our history shows us that although “the practice of youth ministry has been with us for quite a while now (70 to 100 years or so, depending on how you count), it has not always been concerned with theological reflection” (Root & Dean

2011:15). This theological reflection, as noted by Ballard and Pritchard is the primary task of the practical theologian (Ballard & Pritchard 1996:31).

It is now necessary to interact with three modern theologians who provide this much needed theological reflection on the present state of youth ministry.

9.1 Pete Ward

Pete Ward is a British youth worker and writer well-known for his strategic thinking on youth ministry. He was a youthworker for fifteen years followed by five years as the Archbishop of Canterbury's Advisor for Youth Ministry. In 1996 he began teaching at King's College in London and is now the Professorial Fellow in Ecclesiology and Ethnography in the Department of Theology and Religion at Durham University in the United Kingdom.

Ward's theology and philosophy of youth ministry are outlined in two works: *Youthwork and the Mission of God* (1997) and *God in the Mall* (1999) where he offers a critique of the standard model of youth ministry and advocates a different approach to church-based youth ministry, one where the church goes to the outsider rather than one in which the unchurched person must come into the church community. In Ward's work, one can see a clear critique of attractional youth ministry.

9.1.1 Inside Out or Outside In

According to Ward, youth ministry is constructed on one of two traditions: "inside-out" or "outside-in" (Ward 1997:1). Inside-out starts with young people who are inside the church and the group desires to implement evangelism through the inviting friends of these "insiders" who come to a youth event and decide to stay. The other strategy is built on seeking to reach those outside of the church with the aim of bringing them in over a period of time.

9.1.2 Inside-out

Ward describes common church-based youth ministry as "nucleus and fringe," the nucleus is a group of "lively Christians (the nucleus) who are encouraged to invite other youth to the group, these youth become the "fringe" (Ward 1999:14). According to Ward, this is the type of ministry that "the vast majority of Christian youthwork is built on (Ward 1999:15). These young people are often the children of Christian parents who attend the church (Ward 1997:7-8). Ward explains the inside-out strategy for evangelism:

Through a combination of social activities and a programme of teaching, prayer and worship the group is encouraged and built up the faith. In this way they form a 'nucleus' of lively

Christians. The core group, however, are also encouraged to invite other young people to join the group. Evangelism is a major priority in the group's life together (Ward 1997:7-8).

In Ward's opinion this group is often designed around the parent's desire for a safe place for their children to have Christian fellowship (Ward 1997:16), and the church's obligation to raise their young people in the faith "nucleus model has come about because the Church has a duty to bring up its own young people in the faith (Ward 1997:21). These youth who make up the nucleus are often those who have graduated from Sunday school or who have been confirmed (Ward 1999:14). As stated earlier, Ward classifies the inside-out methodology of nucleus-fringe as that which typifies the common church. In his words, "The present-day Christian youthwork scene is characterized by the nucleus-fringe tradition and when churches talk about youthwork they almost always are talking about this tradition" (Ward 1997:12).

9.1.3 Outside-in

Ward strongly advocates that instead of an inside-out approach, which inevitably leads to a nucleus and fringe dynamic in the church, we should adopt as well an outside-in strategy. He cites Christian tradition as supporting his view claiming that the Christian church has long had a desire to reach the "poor" and the "ragged" (Ward 1999:18). To work outside-in, according to Ward, means that the youthworker or evangelist must aim to work with those who are socially and culturally distant from the existing Church and he or she must share the message of Jesus through getting to know them, by being with them and earning their trust (Ward 1997:11).

Ward cites his early ministry's failure to grow through the nucleus-fringe method and writes that his experience caused him to believe that those who made up the nucleus in his ministry were either "unwilling or unable to attract non-Christians into the group. The nucleus approach was not working" (Ward 1997:46). He believes there is an inbuilt flaw in the inside-out strategy of like attracting like as youth are characterized by having limited social connections; they usually are friends with people who are very similar to them (Ward 1997:10). It is therefore unavoidable that your group will be characterized by a similar social mix of youth. In his words

A predominance of relatively wealthy middle-class young people in our group will lead to a middle-class group. The young people coming to faith will be 'unchurched' but they will be the unchurched of a particular type. Reliance on friendship evangelism ensures that we only reach those young people who fit the existing social make-up of the group (Ward 1997:10).

Ward also believes that the church itself is a subculture that may be difficult for other subcultures to feel welcomed in. While within the church, the youth ministry may be seen to be different and innovative, this does not necessarily mean that it will be acceptable to a young person from a subculture that is far removed from the church subculture (Ward 1999:23).

9.1.4 Ward and Incarnational Youth Ministry

Ward's view of youth ministry is based on older Christian adults seeking to develop relationships with young people. Whereas the inside-out approach is built on friends seeking to reach friends, incarnational youth ministry is built on older people seeking to intentionally befriend youth with the aim of "crossing a social boundary in order that we might bring about change in the lives of young people" (Ward 1997:43). He cites the incarnation of Jesus who became a human being to build a relationship with us. In the same way, a youthworker must go to a particular group of youth to bring the gospel in the flesh (Ward 1997:13). Ward believes that youth need to see faith in action as a "living reality" in another person's life (Ward 1999:54) and that young people will learn to become Christian if they are in regular informal contact with Christian people who model the faith (Ward 1997:29). This comes about in a number of stages, firstly through making initial contact with a young person, then building times of extended contact where a relationship is built, this is followed by a proclamation of the gospel within the context of this relationship. Following on from this is nurturing them in the Christian faith with the ultimate goal of bringing them to an established body of believers (the church).

9.1.5 The Difficulty with Outside-In

Ward acknowledges that incarnational youth ministry is not without its challenges. It is prone to failure (Ward 1997:12), extremely demanding and needs people with special training and a "pioneer spirit" (Ward 1997:14). In addition, the goal of proclaiming the gospel can be downplayed or even ignored. In addition, quite often those youth who are brought to faith can find it difficult to be welcomed into a church community (Ward 1997:15). Finally, not everyone can do it. Ward suggests that only those who are socially confident and can enter into conversations easily with people they do not know should attempt outside-in ministry (Ward 1997:50).

9.2 Andy Root

Andy Root teaches youth and family ministry at Luther Seminary in St. Paul Minnesota. He is the author of multiple works on youth ministry as well as practical theology and his understanding of youth ministry is outlined in *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry* (2007), where he clearly outlines his commitment to incarnational youth ministry. In *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry* (2011) co-written with Kenda Creasy Dean, Root outlines his desire for youth ministry to be a discipline grounded in theology and intellectual rigor where youth leaders move from a self-perception of ministry directors and instead regard themselves as theologians engaged in "constructive theology in

the context of ministry with the adolescent population” (Dean & Root 2011:39). He believes that youth ministry has suffered because it has “been seen as lightweight both intellectually and ministerially because we have failed to see ourselves as theologians doing a fundamentally theological task” (Dean & Root 2011:37-38). We must, as youth leaders, “move boldly into deep theological construction” (Dean & Root 2011:39).

Root believes that “good ministry leads to good theology” as ministry always precedes theology and is the fuel for constructive theological thought due to the fact that God is at work in this world (Dean & Root 2011:40). Root believes that God is not a theologian but rather “the Minister” and therefore our ministry is participation with God’s Ministry (Dean & Root 2011:40 capitalization his). We must join in with the work that God is doing as Triune God. Root says:

By looking at God’s Ministry of creation, covenant, incarnation (including crucifixion and resurrection) and Pentecost, it is obvious that God is not a theologian but a (the!) Minister. *God has committed to be the Minister of creation, and theology is reflection on and articulation of God’s Ministry.* If we confess that God is active, that God is moving creation to its completion, then ministry is participation in God’s own act of Ministry, and theology is nothing more than reflecting on God’s action. And if it is true that God is alive and moving in the world as Minister, then all constructive theological work must be done in conversation and connection with this same world to which God is in God’s tri-unity. To be in contact with this world is to be in ministry, and therefore is to do theology (Dean & Root 2011:40 italics, capitalization and punctuation are his).

For Root, youth ministry is a connection with this ministry of God’s and must reflect a desire to join with God’s Ministry to youth. This means that we must be able to, in his words, articulate how God is active in their and our lives and we must value highly their humanity in love (Dean & Root 2011:40).

9.2.1 Root and Scripture

While Root sees experience and ministry as the starting point for theology, he believes that a robust understanding of Scripture is necessary for an informed reflection on something experienced. He calls the reader to ask what Scripture and theologians say about the experience and issue that is being dealt with. This will give us a “broader and deeper vision of how our experience should be understood in the light of God’s ministry” (Dean & Root 2011:44). In his mind, we need Scripture and the writings of theologians within one’s tradition to help us interpret our experience and gain a vision of what God is doing (Dean & Root 2011:44).

9.2.2 Root and the Incarnational Model of Youth Ministry

Root is experienced in the model of youth ministry espoused by Young Life (Root 2007:13) but his early experience showed him that sometime this model would fail. He cites his experience in Los

Angeles where the youth he sought to reach were “so wounded they had never learned how to allow themselves to be cared for, and we had no idea how to care for those who, on the one hand, refuse our care, but on the other, continued to ask for it” (Root 2007:14). This experience was pivotal and it was through his readings of the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer that he realized that,

... the incarnational was not a model or example, to be followed but was the very power of God present in human form among us today. I discovered that Jesus Christ is concretely present to us in our relational lives, in our person-to-person encounters in the *I* and *you* (Root 2007:14 italics his).

This reading of Bonhoeffer moved Root to see ministry not as seeking to move young people to “accept a third thing” like Christian conversion but rather it is about a connection between two people who share with “no pretense or secret motives” but it is about connecting together in a relationship with Christ within this relationship (Root 2007:15). In this ministry Root believes that there is no room for a success of failure mentality, rather, the goal is simply to help young people to be human and to discover this through the relationship with another, and with Christ present (Root 2007:15). Root bases this on the incarnation of Jesus Christ where he believes that Christ came not to wield influence but rather for “accompaniment”. It is not about the correction of behavior but to illuminate us to the embrace of God who loves us and wants to be with us (Root 2007:79).

Root offers a strong critique of ministry that seeks to influence young people towards a goal or uses relationships for influence (Root 2007:92). Rather, he sees the incarnation as a “call to shared solidarity in common humanity” (Root 2007:92). In his words

Relational ministry is about helping adolescents be authentic human beings as determined by the incarnate, human Christ. It joins them in full solidarity with humanity, helping them avoid and oppose that which dehumanizes, and helping them claim their humanity in worship and service of the human God (Root 2007:92).

Instead, Root wants a relationship based on “place-sharing.” This is where a relationship is built on actions with and for the other person rather than one founded on the self-preservation and self-determination of the old humanity (Root 2007:128). This place-sharing is the “ultimate reality of humanity” for it is the new humanity based on the power of Jesus Christ (Root 2007:128). Place-sharing, according to Root, is a much deeper concept than a relationship based enjoying another’s company. Rather, it is one “empowered by the humanity of God” that “demands action that is responsible for the very humanity of the other person” as we stand in their place becoming their advocate in their crisis and pain (Root 2007:126). It is here in relationships that we see the “transcendent otherness of God” (Root 2007:141).

While Root is squarely in the incarnational model of youth ministry, he distances himself from those who concentrate on relationships as merely the proper setting to bring about effective evangelism.

Rather, his view is that incarnational ministry is a place where we experience the otherness of God as we encounter another person. As this happens, God is present meeting both and transforming both, leading them to be that which they were created to be (Root 2007:140). In addition, one must not cheapen incarnational evangelism by viewing influence as the final outcome. Rather Root believes that relationships are the location where a unique encounter happens and the older person can experience the otherness of God through this adolescent (Root 2007:140).

9.3 Kenda Creasy Dean

Kenda Creasy Dean is an ordained United Methodist pastor in the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference and the Mary D. Synnott Professor of Youth, Church and Culture at Princeton Theological Seminary. Dean offers a strong commentary on the failure of the modern church in America to develop disciples who are passionate about the Christian faith and can stay with the church past high school. Her later works build heavily on Smith and Denton's research and her book *Almost Christian* is her opinion on the results of that study, of which she was a contributor. Dean has long been critical of present-day youth ministry warning in 1998 that there is an "exodus of adolescents from our churches" that ought to cause us to reflect deeply on youth ministry today (Dean 1998:31). However, the average church is "running out steam, ideas, and hope" (Dean 1998:9).

9.3.1 The Great Paradigm Shift in Youth Ministry Today

Dean believes that youth ministry is undergoing a fundamental paradigm shift due to the fact that it is not producing Christian maturity for the youth who participate (Dean 1998:25). She is critical of the direction that youth ministry has taken believing that youth groups are generally not a place where robust faith is fostered (Dean 1998:30). It is her belief that the youth of today do not have a faith that is durable and will not survive them after they leave high school (Dean 2010:3). Instead of vibrant faith communities, our youth programs are a "sanctified holding tank" that protected young people from evil rather than equipping them with the necessary skills for a life of faith (Dean 2004:148). We have produced offspring that, in her words, are mules rather than horses (Dean 2004:148); they may look healthy, but they cannot reproduce (Dean 2004:147). We have modeled in our churches a "do-good feel-good spirituality" that has little to do with Christian tradition or following Jesus day to day (Dean 2010a:4). She asks if we have given youth in the church "a watered-down gospel so devoid of God's self-giving love in Jesus Christ, so immune to the sending love of the Holy Spirit that it might not be Christianity at all" (Dean 2010a:12).

In Dean's view, the crisis facing our adolescents is not simply confined to them—it is a situation facing the whole church. The fact that our youth have an unsustainable faith "echoing adults faith" derives from what they have observed and been taught from their parents (Dean 2010a:4). One of the

key issues for Dean is that we have presented young people with a Christianity that simply does not ultimately matter, and this must be reversed (Dean 1998:15). We must, as a church, move beyond the “shallow end of the theological pool” (Dean 2004:174) and move beyond a “Jesus-the-friendly-ghost theology to far more complex renderings of God” (Dean 2004:105).

9.3.2 Youth Ministry Must Promote Relationships

Dean would be classified as one who agrees with the incarnational understanding of youth ministry. In *The Godbearing Life* she writes that “God calls each of us to become a Godbearer through whom God may enter the world again and again” (Dean 1998:18). It is her belief that, in the same way that God called young Mary to bring Jesus into this world (the original Godbearer), God calls each of us to bring Godbearing youth ministry into the lives of adolescents.

Dean presses the fact that youth ministry, and indeed the Christian church as a whole must be characterized by quality relationships. She would be in agreement with Pete Ward’s commitment of incarnational ministry believing that as we grow in our relationships with youth, we show them the gospel “in a way that prepares them for mission (Dean 1998:26). These relationships must take priority over a program built on a ski trip or a slice of pizza (Dean 1998:25). Youth ministry that promotes depth of relationship will also help young people in the process of identity formation (Dean 1998:27). For Dean, small groups are crucial. These groups allow youth to engage in something “profoundly sacred” as they give an individual the chance to belong to others (Dean 2004:178).

The relationship between a young person and a caring adult that is key according to Dean as this “adult guarantor” sees in them potential that they do not yet see in themselves (Dean 1998:27). In addition, as an adult shows concern and sympathy for the youth’s well-being, the youth then transfers loyalty and trust to the adult allowing them to hold some degree of moral sway on them (Dean 2004:180). This adult can also bear witness by way of example to the availability of Christ’s transformative power to the young person (Dean 2004:243).

9.3.3 Dean and the Role of Theology in Youth Ministry

Dean understands youth ministry to be, at its core, a theological endeavour (Dean 1998:56). She believes that since ministry is God’s work, God will “break through” our limitations helping to overcome any cultural misunderstandings and minister to a young person no matter where they are at developmentally (Dean 1998:57). With this in mind, Dean urges her readers to avoid ministering in a way that promotes “McFaith” which, in her words, is a “Disneyland approach to ministry” (Dean 1998:61). This is what comes from the desire to “secure a quick fix for long-term spiritual neglect” built on “market analysis and curb appeal” (Dean 1998:61). She writes”

Godbearing youth ministry must weigh carefully what it borrows from the entertainment industry in order to reach youth. In a world increasingly defined by virtual reality, the church remains a harbinger of authentic relationships and primary experience. In a world saturated by fantastic special effects, the church claims direct access to the sacred (Dean 1998:62).

She cites the failure of modern youth ministry as not one based on faulty models or strategies as much as a simple “failure of theology” due to a “flabby theological identity due to an absence of passion” (Dean 2004:25). It is her belief that youth ministry simply reflects the church as a whole not grasping the need for a self-sacrificial identity based on a passionate embrace of God. Her call is for the church to be built on this understanding of a passionate God. She writes:

Youth ministry must invite young people into communities that practice passion—not just any passion but God’s passion—through acts of worship and witness that invite us to love foolishly, and to suffer love’s consequences as we seek after God’s own heart. So this is where we begin; with a passionate God, and with young people searching for passionate love, hoping against hope that their search is not in vain (Dean 2004:26).

Helping youth to understand this passionate God will take some time and Dean urges youth leaders to be patient in ministry as they are in the process of helping “embryonic faith develop and grow” (Dean 1998:63).

9.3.4 The Need for Spiritual Maturity Among Youth Leaders

Dean is clear that to correct the failure of modern youth ministry there must be a commitment to maturity among those who minister to youth. She cites the example of Moses in Numbers 11 who set apart people to specifically help him in the task of ministry and leadership (Dean 1998:94). These adults must be the “cream of the crop” filled with wisdom, holiness, perfect love, robust and unapologetic Christian maturity (Dean 1998:94). She cites the church’s commitment to the false belief that “anyone under thirty possessing the innate ability to relate to teenagers” as a gross error and one that has been a commitment to immaturity rather than generating maturity among its youth (Dean 1998:95).

9.4 Ward, Root, and Dean on Attractional Youth Ministry

While Dean, Ward, and Root do not appear to have set out to provide a detailed critique of attractional youth ministry nor Robbins’ Funnel, one can often find an implicit and sometimes explicit negative assessment of this style of ministry.

9.4.1 Kenda Creasy Dean

Dean appears to offer the clearest and fullest critique of attractional youth ministry. It is her belief that modern youth, who are exposed to enormous of information, advertising, and technology, are attracted to the presence of a God in a gathering of worship (Dean 2004:215). She critiques a youth ministry that places a high premium on entertainment and a low value on spiritual depth claiming that much of modern youth ministry lacks “wonder-producing, faith-provoking, life-altering acts of witness that engaged young people in mission in their own right” (Dean 2004:148). She states that youth ministry must promote a commitment to Jesus that is a “life and death investment” otherwise, youth will direct their passion away from Christianity elsewhere (Dean 2004:6). In Christianity, youth can join their innate passion created in them by God with the passion of God demonstrated in Christ (Dean 2004:65). When this happens, according to Dean, a shifting of ground takes place; a youth’s ego makes space for the passion of God thus leading to a new self that is constructed as God’s beloved (Dean 2004:69).

Therefore, it is urgent, in Dean’s mind, for the church to become a place of passion; a gathering of “holy friendships” (Dean 2004:140) and “spiritual friendships” that lead to vulnerability modeled on the self-sacrificing Jesus rather than the “self-destructive patterns of consumerism” (Dean 2004:231). In the end, Dean claims a “passionless church will never address passionate youth,” in fact, she questions whether it is even the true church (Dean 2004:69). However, the church has not responded to this quest for passion, rather, the church is now in crisis stating, “*We are facing a crisis of passion, a crisis that guts Christian theology of its very core, not to mention its lifeblood for adolescents*” (Dean 2004:7 italics hers).

Dean’s desire for young people to enter into a deep, life-giving relationship with others in the church also provides her with a critique of attractional youth ministry. It is her belief that youth ministry that promotes depth of relationship will also help young people in the process of identity formation (Dean 1998:27). For Dean, small groups are crucial. These groups allow youth to engage in something “profoundly sacred” as they give an individual the chance to belong to others (Dean 2004:178). This is where Dean would again distance herself from an attractional model where youth can feel unknown as opposed to a relationally-based one that will meet their needs of “intercourse with people who ‘know’ them” (Dean 2004:230).

Dean believes that youth ministry must be committed to spiritual practices as they will shape the future spiritual life of a young person and equip them for spiritual maturity. She believes that youth leaders must direct young people towards spiritual discipline and practices that help youth to imitate Christ, identify with Christ, and ultimately to experience union with Christ (Dean 2004:163). This is in comparison with event-based youth ministry that may promote an initial hearing of the gospel

message but little else. In fact, in her opinion this methodology has little value in imparting to youth what is necessary for the Christian faith, and, in reality, leaves them floundering spiritually. She notes:

When youth ministry draws its primary energy from special events, “cool” leaders, and high-voltage youth gatherings more than from the long tradition of practices through which youth identify with the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, we communicate a version of faith that has no analogy in the adult church—or in real life, for that matter (Dean 2004:168).

In addition, Dean believes that this “high-voltage” activity-based ministry lacks any power to take young people to the cross of Christ (Dean 2004:168). Following on from this, Dean recommends that repetition in spiritual practices is beneficial in the life of a young person as it deepens their commitment to faith and intensifies the sense of authenticity for the participant (Dean 2004:167-168). These activities, which include worship, liturgy, hospitality, fellowship, proclamation, teaching, and service help to establish the Christian identity in young people (Dean 2004:152). In addition to this is the fact that these practices allow a youth to be changed as they see these acts less as “deeds that dramatize their beliefs, and more and more as means of grace that help them remain responsive before God” (Dean 2004:158). She also believes that these spiritual practices will allow a youth to develop maturity as these disciplines give a young person to have a faith built on “flexibility and portability”. Dean says:

Christian practices therefore assume critical importance. They are the curriculum of youth ministry. In the first place, prayer, preaching tolerance, tithing, living simply, living chastely, conferencing with other Christians, searching Scripture, serving others and so on tether young people to a faith tradition without shackling them to a particular institutional expression of it, giving faith flexibility and portability. In addition, practices shift youth ministry’s attention away from activities and events to communities, which are the fruit of Christian practices. Practices also stress the lived nature of faith, for practices *embody* Christ’s suffering love, thereby preventing Christianity from deteriorating into abstract intellectualism or vapid, generic “feel good-isms” (Dean & Root 2011:34 italics hers).

It is clear that for Kendra Creasy Dean, youth ministry is in a crisis due to the failure of the church to make disciples who are passionate about the Christian faith. This is due, in part, to the church’s failure to incorporate a program that fosters passionate faith in God and equips young people with the necessary abilities necessary for faith after high school. While she does not offer a directed critique at the funnel model of modern youth ministry, it appears to be implied by her writings. In discussing practical theology, she states that our practice comes from the accumulated wisdom of hundreds of situations which move us to form a theory (Dean 2001:36). This wisdom leads to the formation of “the normative ways in which I expect to practice faith with young people so they will encounter the good news of Jesus Christ in this particular ministry, in this particular time and place, that God has laid before me (Dean 2001:36). If the funnel model of ministry is indeed to blame for the present crisis of the North American church, it is due to this fact that the accepted normative way that the church is expected to practice faith with young people is not leading them to encounter the good news of Jesus.

9.4.2 Pete Ward

While Pete Ward does not offer explicit critique of attractional youth ministry, he cites his early ministry's failure to grow through the nucleus-fringe method and cites that his experience caused him to believe that those who made up the nucleus in his ministry were either "unwilling or unable to attract non-Christians into the group" (Ward 1997:46). In his experience, the nucleus approach was ineffective (Ward 1997:46). He believes there is an inbuilt flaw in the inside-out strategy of like attracting like as youth are characterized by having limited social connections; they usually are friends with people who are very similar to them (Ward 1997:10). It is therefore unavoidable that your group will be characterized by a similar social mix of youth. In his words,

A predominance of relatively wealthy middle-class young people in our group will lead to a middle-class group. The young people coming to faith will be 'unchurched' but they will be the unchurched of a particular type. Reliance on friendship evangelism ensures that we only reach those young people who fit the existing social make-up of the group (Ward 1997:10).

Ward believes that it is self-limiting due to its propensity for "like attracting like." Similarly, Christians must go out to actively reach those who are outside of the church, especially those who are of a lower standing socioeconomically.

9.4.3 Andy Root

Root is critical of a utilitarian approach to youth ministry that believes "bigger is better" which is a failure to thinking theologically and also a failure to grasp what God is doing in the lives of the individuals in one's group (Dean & Root 2011:41). Here Root gives an implicit criticism of attractional youth ministry and calls us to "move beyond utilitarianism" and engage in a "real reflection on the practice of ministry to and with young people" (Dean & Root 2011:41). Root criticizes the assumption that youth ministry is for "doers and not thinkers" and calls on his readers to be theologians who see that theory and practice must go together. In other words, we must learn to reflect upon our experiences in youth ministry, discerning what God is doing and therefore move from experience to reflection and then to action (Dean & Root 2011:43). While Andy Root does not appear to be overtly dismissive of attractional ministry, it appears that he desires the youth leader to be so radically committed to deep relationships that this intrinsically removes the need for entertainment or attraction via activities.

10. A Supposition as We Move Forward

Research is clearly indicating that the amount of people who are attending the church in North America is declining. The Pew Center, based in the United States has recently noted that while the United States of America has “had a long history as a majority Protestant nation” this is rapidly declining. A 2007 study identified 51.3% as identifying as Protestants. However, in a 2014 study, this figure has dropped to 46.5% (Lipka 2015). Krejcir notes that the “proportion of the population that is Protestant has declined markedly in recent decades while the proportion of the population that is not affiliated with any particular religion has increased significantly” (Krejcir 2007).

Church attendance and Christian religious affiliation for young people in Canada and the U.S. is down as well. Clark notes that the regular Canadian church attendance rate for people aged 15 to 24 was 34% in 1988. By 1998, when they were 25 to 34 years old, the rate had dropped 10 percentage points to 24%. (Clark 200:23). Statistics from the Pew Research Center show that for young people raised in the church, 44% now claim to be “currently unaffiliated with any particular religion” (Pew 2008:29).

It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss all of the forces that are perceived to be impacting the North American church negatively (Kinnaman in 2011 provides a broad list such as postmodernism, perceived homophobia, the belief that the church is antiscience etc.). However, one question that must be raised in light of the Interpretive Task is, could the decline in the size of the church in North America be due, in part, to the lack of youth moving up the ranks into adulthood? In addition, given Dean’s claim that modern youth ministry is not producing spiritual maturity among its adherents (Dean 1998:95), one could see that it is safe to assume that this must have a negative numerical impact on the present church.

CHAPTER 4 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

1. Introduction

In February and March 2019, I undertook research to inquire about the spiritual health of two groups of very different young people. First was a series of face to face interviews with 15 students attending Briercrest College in Caronport Saskatchewan, Canada. The goal was to hear their reflections on their youth ministry experiences, and, in particular, about the use of entertainment and its impact on attracting newcomers, the development of spiritual health, and the retention of young people in the church.

Following this, I conducted a case study of the youth ministry at St. Johns Anglican Church (Shaughnessy), a Canadian church that followed the Attractional Model for several years prior to my arrival as youth director. This case study seeks to identify the problems of the youth ministry model prior to 2005 and the influence of the Attractional model of youth ministry on the program. In addition, the goal is to establish whether the changes that took place in the youth ministry between 2004-2009 increased longevity among the youth more effectively than the previous program. For the main part of this case study, I interviewed 23 members of the church who were somehow involved in the youth ministry during this time. The key question I sought to answer was: *Was the division of evangelism and discipleship, combined with the use of entertainment as the attraction in evangelism, helpful in faith formation and spiritual longevity or, did it contribute to the failure of youth retention in this North American church?*

1.1 The Selection of St. Johns Church (Shaughnessy)

The selection of this church is noteworthy as this church had commissioned a task force (the Pyramid Task Force) to discover why there was a lack of youth retention for an otherwise large church. In short, this was a church facing a crisis in youth ministry and was trying to discern the correct response to this crisis. This task force released their findings in October of 2002. This document, which will be examined in the following pages is a valuable archival record that helped shape the research survey that was conducted with those participants I surveyed in Vancouver in 2019.

1.2 The Decision to Compare and Contrast

I chose to compare and contrast the students from the prairies with the church in Vancouver as I wanted to see any similarities and patterns between the two. I wanted to see if, between these two very different worlds, there were any parallels in the role of entertainment as the entry point for youth ministry (the Come Level of the Funnel). Similarly, I wanted to see the impact of this and whether or not it was successful in the retention of young people. I was also looking for any patterns that might transcend the complexities of culture, geography, and experiences between these two very different

groups (Marshall & Rossman 1999:21). In short, would these places, separated by geography and, in many ways vastly different in culture, have any “salient themes, recurring ideas or language, and patterns of belief that link people and settings together” (Marshall & Rossman 1999:154).

2. Understanding Qualitative Research

2.1 Introduction

Denzin and Lincoln see qualitative research as collecting and studying a variety of empirical materials including: case study, personal experience, interviews, historical data, and visual texts. The goal is “to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand (Denzin & Lincoln 1998:3). Swinton and Mowat agree claiming that, while qualitative research may be hard to define, it involves a “variety of methods” with the goal being to understand the “unique ways that individuals and communities inhabit” this social world (Swinton & Mowat 2006:29). While qualitative research may be a complex field with a variety of terms, concepts, and assumptions, (Denzin & Lincoln 1998:2) a qualitative survey may involve “challenging conventional generalizations and social stereotypes” (Yin 2011:10).

2.2 Qualitative Research and The Research Problem

The purpose of the interviews and case study is to provide some identifiable results of the Attractional Model of youth ministry both in the Canadian prairies and the Funnel Model of youth ministry used at St. John’s (Shaughnessy). The goal is to, as Osmer encourages, determine program effectiveness, improve a program, and solve a specific problem (Osmer 2008:49). In conducting these interviews, it was my desire to see how a qualitative study of both St. John’s and the very different world of the Canadian prairies would challenge conventional generalizations in the Christian community. This pertains to the use of entertainment in youth ministry and its effectiveness in not only attracting newcomers but in the retention of both the unchurched newcomer and the young person from within the church. The data collected from St. John’s (Shaughnessy) provide concrete results of changes, notably, the growth in numbers and the longevity of participation by youth into adulthood. The interviews give an account of the personal experience of those who were involved in the youth program before and after changes were implemented. It was my hope that through this research I could understand two unique groups of people “engage in the meanings they ascribe to their experience” (Osmer 2008: 49-50).

2.3 Qualitative Research and The Choice of St. John’s (Shaughnessy)

I chose St. John’s (Shaughnessy) as a case study because of my personal involvement with the church but more importantly, I believe that it falls in line with what Yin would call a critical, unique, typical, revelatory and longitudinal case (Yin 2003:40-42).

i. A Critical Case

St. John's (Shaughnessy) represents a critical case as it "tests a well-formulated theory" (Yin 2003:40). I wanted to test whether the Funnel model helped this youth group in the retention of its members or work against retention. The case study represents a picture of a youth ministry that incorporated the Funnel and my goal was to evaluate this ministry.

ii. A Unique Case

This church also represents a unique case where a Canadian church changed its ministry strategy resulting in a reversal of the problems facing many Canadian churches as described in *Hemorrhaging Faith* (Penner et al 2011).

iii. A Typical Case

The St. John's (Shaughnessy) case study represents a typical case as the problems that the church was experiencing are representative of many churches in North America. Yin notes that the lessons learned from a case such as this one "are assumed to be informative about the experiences of the average person or institution" (Yin 2003:41). St. John's may also provide assistance in understanding what is going on externally, in this case in North America. It may also help us to "provide insight into an issue" (Stake 1994:237). In the scope of this research, it is my hope that the St. John's case study can shed light into what is happening in Canada (and the U.S.A.) and provide insight as to increasing retention rates among youth.

iv. A Revelatory Case

This is a revelatory case as it is an opportunity to observe and analyze a phenomenon previously inaccessible to scientific investigation. St. John's youth ministry has the advantage of, as a case study, of having a documented record of a wholesale change in the program.

v. A Longitudinal Case

Finally, the St. John's (Shaughnessy) case study is a longitudinal case as it is studied over a long period of time. The study will show results from prior to 2005 through to 2009 and then a reflection on the youth ministry ten years later.

2.4 Collecting Data

The case study used a number of different materials and artifacts assembling, as Orum et al encourage, "complementary and overlapping measures" (Orum et al 1991:19). It also incorporated the six sources of evidence as outlined by Yin: documentation; archival records; interviews; direct observation; participant observation; physical artifacts (Yin 2003:85-97). The source of evidence described as "direct observation" is retrospective and drawn on my personal experience of intimate involvement in the ministry and lives of individuals during the period of change (2004-2009). However, direct

observation is also in the form of interviews of those currently involved in the youth group and so will overlap with the source of evidence described as “participant observation” (Leedy & Ormrod 2013:152). This will also reflect the desire to “capture the meaning of real-world events from the perspective of the study’s participants” (Yin 2011:10). I also relied on multiple sources of information namely interviews, historical documents and personal observation (Osmer 2008:51). The goal of this case study is to provide what Marshall and Rossman call “vividness and detail” that may not be present on other forms of research (Marshall & Rossman 1999:159).

Marshall and Rossman encourage researchers to rely on four procedures to gather information: participation in the setting, direct observation, in-depth interviewing, and analyzing documents and materials (Marshall & Rossman 1999:105). One of the reasons I chose St. John’s as a test case was that I was intimately involved in the church after the Pyramid Task Force released its findings. I was a participant in the changes that were set into place in response to this document and participated in direct observation of the previous program and then an alternate program designed to increase retention. In addition to this, I was able to conduct 21 face to face conversations and two conversations over Skype engaging in qualitative in-depth interviews in order to gather large amounts of information quickly (Marshall & Rossman 1999:108). The goal being to uncover the views of a wide variety of people who were involved in the St. John’s youth ministry program.

2.5 Qualitative Research Plan

In the analysis of qualitative research, Yin advises a five-phase cycle (Yin 2011:177-179). This involves: 1 Compiling and ordering your notes, 2 Disassembling the data into smaller pieces, 3 Reassembling and reorganizing this data into groupings, noting substantive themes, 4 Interpreting newly assembled data, and 5 Drawing conclusions from the study. In addition, Yin urges the formation of a glossary to become a “data dictionary” to help define important terminology (Yin 2011:183). In my interviews with the Briercrest Students and the St. John’s (Shaughnessy) case study, I have followed Yin’s pattern taking personal notes, compiling a full transcript of the interviews, and then looking for themes or patterns that occurred. At the end of this chapter and in the next chapter some conclusions will be drawn from the research and subsequent analysis.

2.6 Analysis of the Data

Yin strongly urges the researcher to aim for rigor in the analysis of data (Yin 2011:177). He cites three precautions that must be applied:

1. Checking and rechecking the accuracy of the data.
2. Making your analysis as thorough and complete as possible.
3. Continually acknowledging unwanted biases imposed by your own values as you analyze the data.

In my research, I sought to maintain rigor through a thorough process of notation. During the interviews, I made my own personal notes. In addition, the interviews were recorded (with each participant's written permission) and transcribed word for word. (Two of the recordings, one from St John's (SJM21) and one from the Briercrest students (PRAIRIE6) ended before the conversation was over, in these cases, I relied on my notes to complete the missing data.)

I have chosen not to utilize a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS). Yin warns that "even with such a program it still depends on the researcher to do the analytical thinking and provide the input data for the computer program to arrive at a result" (Yin 2011:180). Yin notes that

You as the analyst still need to provide a set of input data, usually taking the form of text, not numbers. More importantly, you cannot call upon a preset formula as in quantitative research but must yourself develop the entire underlying substantive procedure, such as sorting, coding, combining, and recombining portions of the text.

In the interview process, I took great care to "attending carefully to the verbal and nonverbal responses of the interviewee" (Osmer 2008:62-63). I was also aware that tools and methods, while helpful, were not as necessary as my personal awareness that I was the "primary tool that is used to access the meanings" of the topics explored in the interview process (Swinton & Mowat 2006:60).

Having complete transcripts allowed me to identify the number of occurrences of often repeated words as well as their context. Recurring key words taken directly from transcripts are listed later in this chapter including the frequency of their occurrence.

On a final note, while I approached each interview with a dedicated list of questions, in the actual interviews I also recognized Osmer's description of an interview as a "conversation between two people" (Osmer 2008:61). A conversation can take many unexpected turns and I soon learned that Osmer was correct when he urged a certain amount of flexibility and open-endedness in the process (Osmer 2008:62). This means that while there was a clear and distinct effort to ensure each question was answered, the natural ebb and flow of the interview, in certain cases, led to questions being answered in a different order or pattern than was planned. In the interview process, I sought, as Fontana and Frey urge, to be "flexible, objective, empathic, persuasive and a good listener" (Fontana & Frey 1998:55).

2.7 Identifying Biases

In research, it is necessary to identify any bias that will influence the judgement of the researcher. Yin points out that no research is free from bias, each one sees the information and the information gathering process through a subjective and objective lens (Yin 2011:270). Janesick agrees believing that all research is "ideologically driven" (Janesick 1994:212) and Denzin agrees suggesting that

completely objective interpretations are impossible (Denzin 1998b:328). Coming into the interviews with both the Caronport students and the parishioners of St. John's (Shaughnessy), I was aware of a number of biases that I would bring into the interviews. The first being that I have previously written against the use of attractional entertainment in evangelism (Moser 2003; Moser 2004). In addition to this, speaking with many Caronport students over the past nine years has made me aware that many of the youth leaders were under the leadership of older youth leaders who had either read Duffy Robbins' material or attended a seminar that he had led. Following on from this, the 2011 *Hemorrhaging Faith* report confirmed many of my suspicions about the recent history of ineffectiveness in Canadian youth ministry.

In addition, it was my belief that many of the students attending Briercrest, a Christian College, were "survivors of the youth ministry," by this I mean that these students represented the few who successfully made the transition from being a Christian in high school to staying a Christian long-term. It has been my experience that the key factor that helped maintain this Christian faith was the role of Christian parents in discipleship or a mentor in another setting such as summer camp. It was also my belief that the students that I would interview may be those who enjoy the "fun" aspect to attractional youth ministry and therefore again, are, in my mind, "survivors" of a model that has trouble retaining the majority of the youth who attended the program.

There was also the potential bias that some of the students who I interviewed had done my Foundations of Youth Ministry class where we briefly examine the Funnel Model of youth ministry. However, there were also some that had not. In addition, historically not all the students who took this course agreed with a critical view of attractional youth ministry as they had a positive experience with it. There may also be a certain amount of bias towards the youth ministry at St. John's (Shaughnessy) as I was the youth director who initiated the change in program in 2005.

Finally, I have had a long-held skepticism about the effectiveness of entertainment as an effective evangelism strategy. This comes, in part through my theological views and also my reading and research into youth ministry. I am a conservative evangelical who holds to a grammatical-historical reading of Scripture in the reformed tradition who sees Scripture as our guide for all aspects of faith and practice.

3. St. John's (Shaughnessy) Case Study

3.1 Introduction

This case study involves the examining of a report conducted by an advisory group organized by St John's (the Pyramid Task Force) and a series of interviews with a cross-section of members of St

John's before and after the changes were made. There will also be reference to some supporting historical documents that provide some additional data about the St John's youth ministry.

In October 27, 2004, I became the Youth Director at St. John's (Shaughnessy) Anglican Church. This job was shared with my wife Julie. St. John's is a conservative Anglican church in the Diocese of New Westminster in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Shaughnessy is a residential suburb with a "higher than average proportion of heritage houses" (Vancouver 2019). This neighbourhood consists of large 5,000 to 10,000 square foot houses, on large, landscaped lots (Smedman 2013). When my wife and I arrived, we were told that "on paper the congregation is around 1200 people," however, the job description said 800 and the church's present website states that "St. John's averages 600 people between all 4 services on a Sunday" (St. John's Vancouver 2019).

As we settled in and familiarized ourselves with the congregation, we immediately found that, for a sizable church, the youth ministry consisted of a small number of young people, spread out over a number of different ministries. There was an identical Sunday morning program held at 9:00 a.m. and at 11:00 a.m. This was designed to reflect the morning services which were identical in liturgy and sermon. It was also designed to allow flexibility in attendance—you were not expected to regularly attend one service or the other, you would go depending on your schedule. On every other Friday evening, there was a social activity held at the church. This was promoted in the weekly church bulletin as, "great fellowship, food, and fun." This event appeared to us to be based around indoor hockey for the males and watching a film on a large screen television for the females as these were the activities run most often. The first Friday event we attended had eight boys and three girls.

The young adults' group had ten people who attended with only two of them from the church itself (the minister's son and a board member's daughter). The Sunday meeting held at 9:00 a.m. had an average attendance of two youth and the 11:00 a.m. had approximately twelve youth in regular attendance.

3.2 The Report of the Pyramid Task Force

At the Vestry (an Anglican church committee meeting) of St. John's Anglican Church (Shaughnessy) in Vancouver, British Columbia the issue was raised in February of 2002 on "the steady loss of children from church life through the mid-late teenage years" (Bentley et al 2002). From this meeting, an advisory task force was organized with the mandate to "gather information about the actual shape of the youth ministry and to confirm the existence of a significant falling off of participation among older teens" (Bentley et al 2002). In addition to this was the goal to analyse this structure and create solutions, recommendations, actions and timelines" (Bentley et al 2002). This task force consisted of ten members including one youth under the age of eighteen and the youth minister at the time. The

chair of the committee was a published university professor at the University of British Columbia with a doctorate in urban geography.

In the research process, over 40 people were interviewed individually and in focus groups. This included parents, past and present youth, and leaders of other youth ministries in Vancouver. In October 2002 the task force released its report on the youth ministry of St. John's Anglican Church (Shaughnessy). This seven-page document highlights the struggles the church was having in youth retention. The introduction to the report presents the issue

At St. John's there is a steady loss of children from church life through the mid-late teenage years. The church has a very broad base of children in Sunday School, but with increasing age there is a steady decline in attendance, tapering to very few regular attendants in grades 11 and 12 and continuing on into the early twenties – *ie*, a pyramidal structure. In this report we examine explanations for this decline in attendance, and offer some recommendations for action (Bentley et al 2002 spelling and punctuation theirs).

The report also cites their own research from other churches in the immediate area. It notes that the typical Sunday attendance for these churches is

Church *a* - grades 5-7, 20 kids, grades 11-12, 5 kids
 Church *b* - grades 5-6, 50 kids, gr. 11-12, 25
 Church *c* - Sunday School total, 80 kids, gr. 10-12, 12
 St. John's - Gr. 6-7, 25 kids, gr. 11-12, 12

The report notes that, according to the evidence they reviewed, “a significant number (of youth) have become non-participants at St. John's by their mid-late teens” (Bentley et al 2002). It suggests a number of reasons as to why youth stop attending St. John's, among them are:

growing independence among youth
 the explosion of opportunities for leisure time
 the repetitive church programme and liturgy
 the difficulty of commuting to church
 the pressure of schoolwork
 the lack of incorporation of youth into the life of the church.

It is interesting that, while this report is limited to one church in a relatively unique setting (a liturgical, conservative, generally Caucasian church in multicultural, modern urban Vancouver), it represents the problem that many churches in Canada and North America are encountering in according to *Hemorrhaging Faith* (Penner et al 2011). It also reflects the crisis that I have been examining throughout the earlier pages of this paper. The report concludes with a number of recommendations that call for an active engagement in the life of the church calling for the church to see youth not as an “add-on” but rather as an “intrinsic part of church programming and vision” and citing the key words of “participation, ownership, and belonging” (Bentley et al 2002).

While the Pyramid Task Force Report does not appear to be aware of the concept of the One-Eared Mickey Mouse, nor mention it by name, the task force recommended correcting this problem via involving the youth into the fabric and community of the church as a whole. In addition, there does not appear to be any critical examination of the actual content of the youth ministry program and any connection to the lack of retention. It is following the release of this report that my wife, Julie, and I became the youth directors of the church.

Prior to accepting the job, we had discussed with the hiring committee the fact that while we, as veteran youth workers were likely to bring a great degree of change to the program (which was a condition of our hire), we would spend the first few months in observation and fact-finding. We aimed to acquire multiple sources of information through having meals at church member's homes, meeting with various youth to get to know them and talk about their thoughts on the youth ministry, and finally, to observe the various youth ministry gatherings. The goal was to gather data and, as Osmer encourages, to develop a "richly textured picture" of our situation (Osmer 2008:51). In addition to this, we were given the mandate to do everything in our power to structure the group in such a way as to promote longevity and reverse the pyramid structure of the numbers.

3.2.1 St. John's Youth Ministry Prior to the Changes

The report of the Pyramid Task Force outlines the fact that prior to 2004, St. John's (Shaughnessy) had difficulty retaining young people in the church. This fact was reiterated by a number of participants in the interviews conducted from February to March 2019. Included in these interviews was SJM13 who was on the Pyramid Task Force as well as a parent of four children involved in the youth ministry. It is interesting to note that in our interview he began by telling me

There was a burden that people had for their children who, in many cases were out of the church altogether. It was a wake-up call. There was a tremendous children's program but a steady attenuation of numbers until by the time you got to senior high there were two kids. You go from this broad base to nothing.

SJM13 continued that a "pyramid structure was evident" in the youth ministry and repeating his initial statement that the church had "a very large, successful Sunday School (for children)." Following this, he explained the church's desire to find a solution to this issue. In his words

... there was a steady and continuous attrition resulting in very low numbers. We had a desire to break away from the youth ministry model that we were running. There became an intentional search to find a different model—we wanted to see this attrition end and see kids committed to Christ when they went to university.

SJF5 confirmed this in a separate interview commented that "we had a prayer group in our home because we so concerned about the youth ministry because the youth would disappear from grade eleven onwards or so."

3.2.2 St. John's Youth Ministry and the Funnel Model

During this time the church operated a program similar to the Funnel Model of youth ministry. While it did not have all five stages that make up Robbins' model, it had a Come Level activity every other Friday evening followed by a more serious program (Develop Level) that revolved around weekly Bible study each Sunday morning while the adults were in church. The participants in the interviews had various degrees of clarity in their recollections on the program prior to 2004, but there was general agreement that the Friday night was designed to be recreational, social, enjoyable, and attractive to nonchurch youth. The Sunday program was aimed towards discipleship and designed to equip the students to live out the Christian faith. One interview participant was SJM8, a volunteer leader who began in 1997 and then a paid intern in 2003 who also co-led the youth ministry for an interim period. In our interview, SJM8 told me

There was a hope that youth would bring friends and for a few years that vague desire was mostly expressed by making really fun activities so kids would want to invite their friends. There was some emphasis during a previous youth director's leadership and some mention of it during the following leadership.

3.2.3 The Changes of 2005

In January of 2005, wholesale changes were brought to the youth ministry of St. John's (Shaughnessy).

- A new junior high group for grades seven to nine called CTC (Christian Teens Club) was formed meeting Sunday mornings at 11:00.
- A new senior high group called Senior Youth for grades ten to twelve was formed This group met each Sunday afternoon from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
- The Friday night "bring a friend" social program which ran bimonthly was replaced with small group Bible studies.
- The group for young adults (Ekklesia) was moved to Wednesday evening but was relatively unchanged in terms of its programming. There was one addition however, the Ekklesia group was made up of small group Bible studies and one of these became a youth leaders' group which met every week for Bible study and prayer aimed at solidifying the youth ministry.

When Julie and I commenced the new program in January of 2005 we realized that to ensure some degree of success we had to ask the youth to reflect on whether or not they could commit to this new program. This meant that they would have to think about other activities that may conflict with the program at St. John's (such as sporting teams) and whether or not they could schedule their week in such a way as to be able to come regularly to not only the Sunday program but to the weekly small group Bible studies on Friday afternoon as well. This call to commitment was very different to the previous program that reflected a more come and go or drop-in style. A number of people interviewed shared this that in the early stages this was "difficult" in comparison to the previous group and

“discomforting” to many. It is noteworthy that this theme of commitment occurs repeatedly in the interviews.

3.2.4 Numerical Growth

There are no records of attendance for the youth who came to the Friday night program or the two Sunday morning meetings prior to 2004. Annual St. John’s youth ministry reports showed the increase of numbers from approximately 23-28 (this includes nine to ten who attended Ekklesia but came from other churches) to 135 by the end of 2009. One indication of the numerical growth was a combined youth retreat called the All In. This was first held in 2006 over a long weekend in May (a year and four months after the changes). This was a three-day event that included CTC, Senior Youth, and Ekklesia. On the first of these weekends, there were 54 youth in attendance with five of them coming from Ekklesia. This retreat continued and three years later (2009) there 132 attending with 31 young adults.

3.3 St. John’s Interviews

On February 25, 2019, I flew to Vancouver and interviewed 21 people. I conducted another two interviews over Skype. Of the 23 people I interviewed, fourteen of the interviewees were male and nine were female. They were selected on a number of criteria. My goal was to interview a number of key groups of people:

- Youth who were involved in the youth ministry prior to the changes (2005). There were seven who were involved in the youth ministry at this time.
- Parents who were involved in the youth ministry both prior to and after the changes.
- A member of the Pyramid Task Force.
- A staff member who was working for the church prior to my arrival who also experienced the changes in the program.
- People who had been attracted to the program after 2005.

To meet these criteria

- Nine participants in the case study interviews were involved in the program prior to the changes.
- Eight participants were parents of youth involved either before, during, or after the changes.
- One of these adults was also a member of the Pyramid Task Force.
- One participant was a volunteer who helped out behind the scenes (mainly cooking meals and snacks for the youth ministry).

- One participant was the intern in charge (with another intern) of the youth ministry before my arrival.
- Three participants were attracted to the program after the changes.
- In addition, one participant was too young to be involved in the program before the changes and only experienced the group in its new form.

I have obscured the identity of those interviewed by using key words and numbers and genders giving them categories and that distinguish between the two groups (Marshall & Rossman 1999:155). For those from St. John's I have assigned the letters "SJ." Following this, I have placed "M" or "F" to delineate whether the person is male or female. Finally, there is a number ascribed at random.

3.3.1 The Presentation of the Data

Mowat and Swinton see data analysis as a process of bringing "order, structure and meaning" to a large and complicated quantity of information (Swinton & Mowat 2006:57). In order to bring meaning to my data the data collected will follow this format:

- i. The Interview Question/s
- ii. An Overview of the Answers
- iii. Data Analysis and Evaluation: What Was Going On

These interviews amounted to over 130 pages of word for word transcriptions. Due to the volume of information, it is not possible to give a totally comprehensive record of the answers given to each question. However, I have attempted to break down this data and "draw out the meanings" (Swinton & Mowat 2006:57).

Questions one, two and three were designed to find out about their experience with the church. These were "breaking the ice" questions designed to be general and lead to more specific questioning (Fontana & Frey 1998:67). In addition, I wanted to find out if the youth ministry program was helpful or unhelpful in developing Christian maturity. I soon discovered that these questions were interpreted to mean "before the changes of 2005" by those who had been involved in the youth ministry prior to the changes.

For clarity and organization, I have arranged some questions together in groups due to their natural connection with one another.



Figure 0.1 Adults and Youth Interviewed

Adults

Seven = parents with youth in the youth ministry

One = a parent with no children in the youth program

One = an employed youth ministry intern

One = an adult volunteer

Youth

Eight attended St. John's prior to the changes of 2005

Five joined after 2005

QUESTION ONE

i. The Interview Question

What was your involvement with the youth ministry at St. John's?

This initial question was asked to all of those interviewed (adults and youth). It was designed to be relatively open-ended and to give the interview a "sufficiently rich start so that the interviewee can respond expansively and comfortably" (Yin 2011:137). I simply wanted to hear about their relationship with St. John's and the youth ministry program and allow them to expand on this at their comfort level. It is important to note that this question was interpreted by the interviewees in relation to the old program and its effectiveness.

ii. An Overview of the Answers

There was little involvement among the adults I interviewed with the youth ministry. SJF5 spoke of a prayer group she started in her home out of concern for the youth ministry. She said that "the youth seemed to last until maybe a grade eleven at the longest. And then they would just disappear." SJF18 said, "I didn't know very much about it ... it's an age when kids atrophy and drop out."

Eleven of the 13 youth interviewed had parents who attended the church. It is worth noting that many of the youth took this opportunity to give a deeper answer to this question other than simply about their involvement. They chose instead to critique the effectiveness of the program that was in place prior to 2005.

iii. Data Analysis and Evaluation: What Was Going On

While this was designed to be an introductory question. Many of the adults expressed concern over the effectiveness of the program. In addition, there appeared to be a lack of clarity as to what the program was trying to accomplish. Some youth found the program to be enjoyable, but without long-term spiritual impact. Among the adults who were interviewed, there were no strongly negative comments but rather the perception that the program was not effective in reaching any concrete goals. One youth, SJF4 was not positive towards the previous youth ministry noting that she never knew what the Friday evening program was about. “It wasn’t clear, the leaders were always on me to go and commit but there was no bigger picture of what was trying to be achieved.” However, a number of interviewees were not overly critical about the program.

The youth with Christian parents indicated that they attended a weekly Sunday morning program while their parents were in church. It is interesting to note the lack of distinct memories about the Sunday morning. For a gathering that many went to weekly, it did not appear in the interviews have a major impact.

QUESTION TWO (YOUTH)

i. The Interview Question

What was the number one reason you attended youth group?

This question was asked to eight youth who attended prior to the changes. The question was simply to determine the factors that led the young people to attend youth group. I wanted to find out their reasons and motivation for attending the youth group prior to the changes of 2005. My goal was to see if there was a connection between the regularity of their attendance and the activities that were offered. In other words, why did they go (was it fun, meaningful, spiritual, enriching, etc.?)

ii. An Overview of the Answers

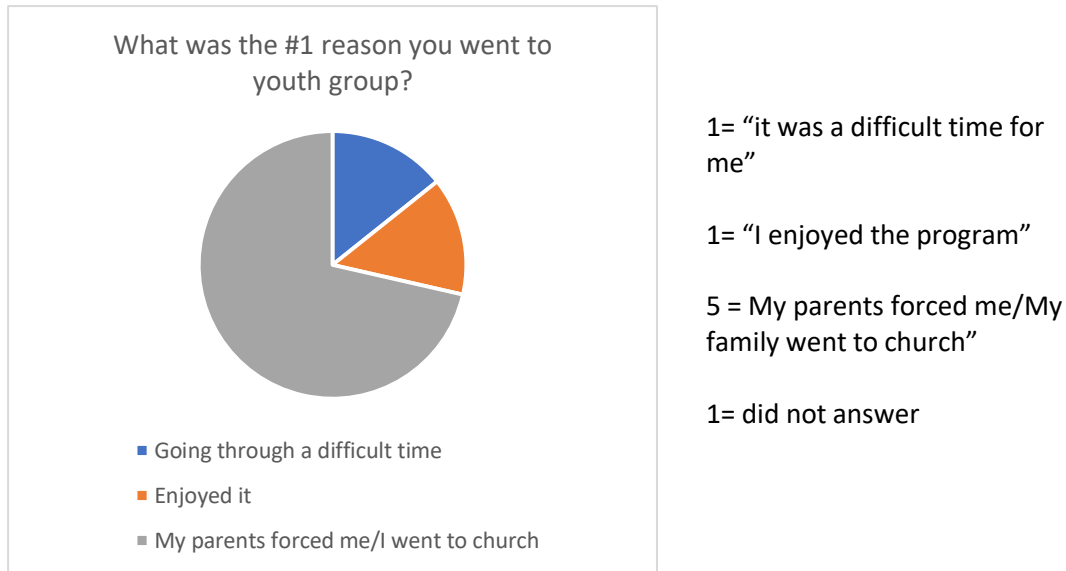


Figure 0.2 What was the #1 reason you went to youth group?

iii. Data Analysis and Evaluation: What Was Going On

The aim of this question was designed to hear from those who were involved in the youth ministry prior to the changes. For these youth, the majority simply went to youth group because of family pressure or expectation. SJM7 and SJM22 summed it up with a very similar response, "My parents went to church and I went with them." However, in lieu of the Pyramid Task Force Report, and answers given later in this interview, it is my belief that they would not continue to go if the old program continued.

Other than the one person who enjoyed the program (SJF12), for the majority of those interviewed, there was no real connection of attendance to the activities that were offered.

QUESTION THREE (YOUTH)

i. The Interview Question

Did your youth group help you grow in your Christian faith? [If yes, how and if no, why?]

This question was designed to find out about the helpfulness of the program before the new program was instituted. Nine youth answered this question (including the adult who was the interim youth leader). Of the eight youth and the one leader who attended prior to the changes, all of them recognized the low spiritual input and, while many enjoyed the program, they were neither overly negative nor overly positive.

ii. An Overview of the Answers

The youth that I interviewed were generally mild with their answers to this question. SJF12 doesn't remember "anything earth-shattering." SJM7 saw the program as a "mixed bag" with "awkward interaction" and "undynamic with no sense of community." SJM22 had a vague recollection of the program saying "he wasn't entirely sure" if it helped him grow. "I don't think it hurt ... it wasn't a bad thing."

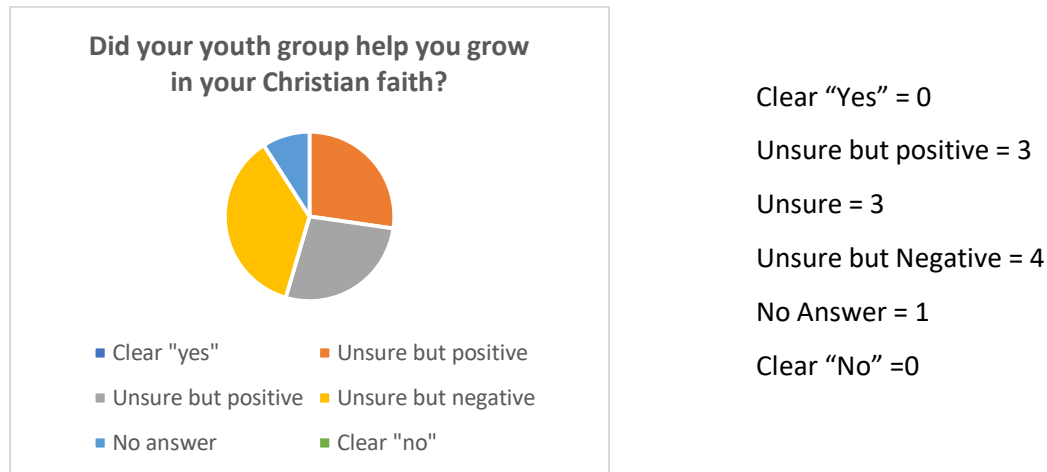


Figure 0.3 Did your youth group help you grow in your Christian faith?

Among mildly positive to positive responses was SJM1 who, while he was lukewarm towards the program, went to a Bible study that an intern organized and found it helpful. SJM7 and SJM6 recalled combined youth nights with other youth groups and while they found them enjoyable, SJM6 admitted the youth program was characterized by a "lack of Bible teaching."

iii. Data Analysis and Evaluation: What Was Going On

Other than SJM1, there were no responses that clearly indicated that the program was helpful in the spiritual development of those who attended. It should be noted that SJM1 went to a weekly small group Bible study that was not an official part of the youth ministry structure.

It is noteworthy that the Sunday morning program, which was designed to promote spiritual development, did not register in the answers given to me in the interviews. The words of SJF18, the intern who helped organize the program are insightful and telling, "We were just doing the things we kinda knew how to do ... we were kinda making it up as we went along, which is kind of embarrassing."

QUESTION FOUR (YOUTH)

i. The Interview Question

What events in the youth ministry program did you feel you could invite a nonhurched friend to?

This question asked to nine youth and was designed to discover if there were events that led to more newcomers attending. I was seeking to discover whether the Friday night social program or the Sunday morning program was effective in evangelism, numerical growth, and retention. The answers were generally negative.

ii. An Overview of the Answers

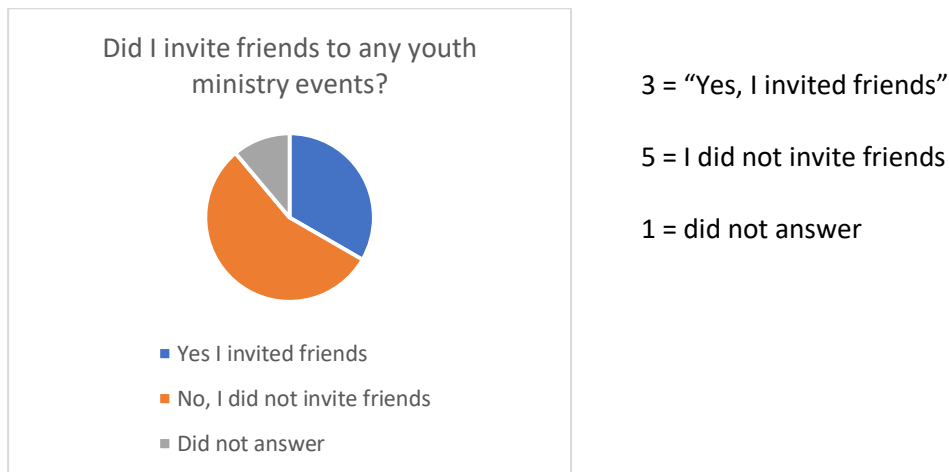


Figure 0.4 Did I invite friends to any youth ministry events?

Of those who did bring a friend, SJF12 answered the question “No” but then remembered that she had a friend spend the night and therefore went to youth group with her. She described the experience as “awkward.” One person, SJM6 invited multiple people. Of those who invited people, none of them came back to the youth ministry program.

iii. Data Analysis and Evaluation: What Was Going On

The program did not appear from the interviews to be successful in numerical growth. SJM6 was a person who invited “three or four.” However, in his words, “They never wanted to come back ... there was nothing cohesive about being there.” While the Friday evening program may have been designed with the goal of attraction, this goal was not met. SJF18, the intern who helped run the program summed up the lack of success by saying, “It was a little enclave of the kids who came.” According to him, two or three newcomers came over a few years, but not many.

The answers to these questions supported my thesis that the Friday night “fun” program was not effective in reaching those outside of St. John’s.

QUESTION FIVE (YOUTH)

i. The Interview Question

Did these events help you grow in the Christian faith? If yes, how?

My goal with this question was to ascertain whether or not the program was helpful or unhelpful in terms of Christian growth. I discovered, however, that, in the natural flow of the conversation, this question seemed to revisit similar answers to Question Three (Did your youth group help you grow in your Christian faith?) though there were a few additional comments are relevant and worth noting.

ii. An Overview of the Answers

None of the interviewees specifically answered the question in terms of “were the bring a friend activities helpful or unhelpful to your faith?” One person (SJM6), cited earlier, said there was “limited Bible teaching” and that the program was mainly about friendship.

iii. Data Analysis and Evaluation: What Was Going On

SJM8’s answer to Question Three is relevant here. He believed the program was an attempt at creating a fun environment designed to be attractive. He acknowledged that there was no deeper spiritual purpose such as growing in the Christian faith.

QUESTION SIX (YOUTH)

i. The Interview Question

Where are most of the youth that you went to youth group with, are they still going to church?

This question was designed to begin to find out their opinions on the retention of the youth in the previous program. This question was not the “why” of leaving (that is Question Seven) but rather to ascertain if they are still involved in church or not.

ii. An Overview of the Answers

The answers were generally negative. They ranged from, “no they are not still involved in church” (SJM1) to, “a few are still in the faith” (SJM22) to, “the ones who had good Christian families who went together are still in the church” (SJF12). SJM17 summed up his perspective by telling me, “The people who were there were very quickly not there. ... I can’t think of anyone who stuck at it.”

iii. Data Analysis and Evaluation: What Was Going On

SJM6 was a youth who attended the youth group prior to my arrival, then a volunteer youth leader while I was the youth director and finally, the youth leader for the group for a year after I left. I provided SJM6 with a list of people who were associated with the youth group before Julie and I became youth directors. This list was compiled by previous youth leaders and contained approximately two hundred names. I asked SJM6 via email if he could go back and review this list of youth group names from the time prior to 2005. A few weeks later we met, and he told me

There were a lot of names I didn't recognize. I went on Facebook and looked up one person. I recognized her face, I think I know who invited her but she never stayed. There was some bringing of friends, but nothing retained them. There were many who had contact with the group but there was no stickiness.

The interviews indicated that the program was not effective in keeping youth in the church. There was no one who made a positive connection between the youth ministry program and retention. The reasons why they dropped out are given in the next question. As I analyze the data I find that the Friday night program did not appear to be effective and the Sunday morning program did not appear to be in any way memorable.

QUESTION SEVEN, TEN (YOUTH), QUESTION FOUR (ADULTS)

i. The Interview Question

Question 7: *What do you think are the reasons why those that didn't stay in the church left?*
(Youth)

Question 10: *Prior to 2005 St. John's had a problem with losing its young people – what do you attribute to the retention failure?* (Youth)

Question 4: *Prior to 2005 St. John's had a problem with losing its young people—what do you attribute to the retention failure?* (Adults)

In the interview process, I discovered that there was a natural similarity between questions six and ten. Therefore, they are combined in this category (even though they were separated in the interview).

There were 16 respondents to these questions. Of the seven who did not respond, five joined were youth who joined the program after the change of 2005 and two were parents of youth who had not joined the youth ministry. This category of questions was designed to discover issues of failure of retention in the previous program and the reasons why those who left the youth group did not stay. This part of the interview process (and continuing on in the following questions) was a part where many of those interviewed spoke at length.

ii. An Overview of the Answers

The answers from the youth ranged from “no, they are not still involved in church” (SJM1) to “a few are still in the faith” (SJM22) to “the ones who had good Christian families who went together are still in the church” (SJF12).

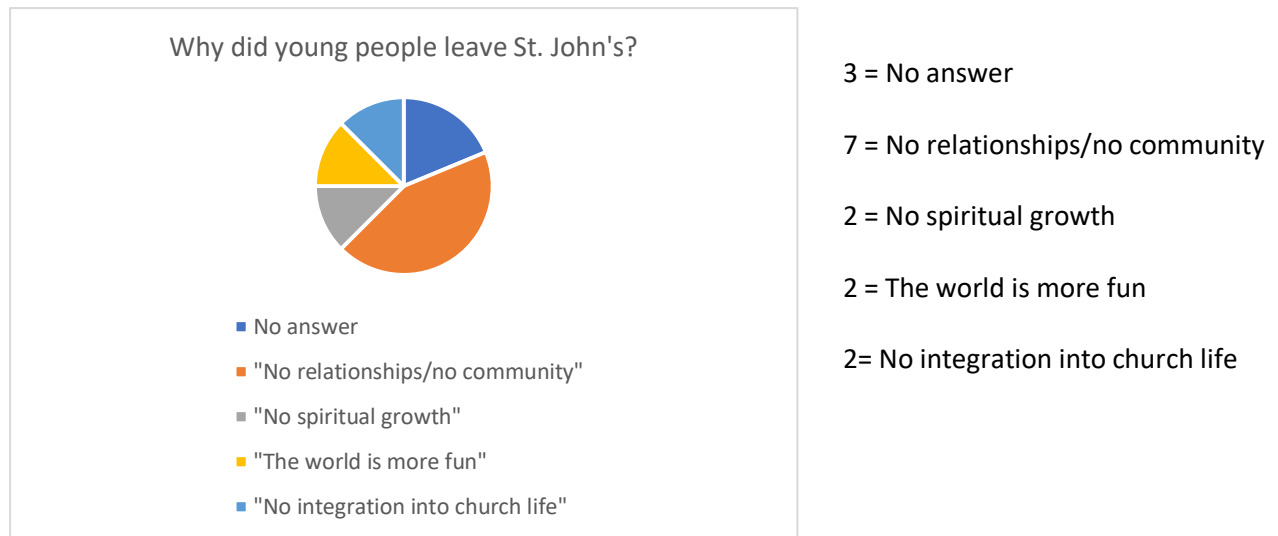


Figure 0.5 Why did young people leave St. John's?

The parents and adults concentrated on three areas: the lack of faith development in the youth, and the inability of the program to compete with the world and the program's inability to "ground young people in the church." SJF18 asked that if it was just a fun program "with no real rootedness, why would a kid keep going, especially if they are asking big questions about faith?" SJF5 commented on the inability to compete with the world, In her words,

The world is very attractive and if the church is trying to draw the kids in with fun activities like the world, it isn't as much fun. Why would you come to a youth group where you can go to a party and do things you can't do in youth group?

SJM9, an adult volunteer who was there prior to the change, provided helpful insight and summary about the ministry and its identity. He answered this question by saying, "There was nothing cohesive in the group." In his words

I just don't think they were focusing on who they were—it was just a ministry. But they didn't realize that to keep you in church beyond Sunday school there wasn't any real program. One day they become adults and, if they are not kept in church with youth and university-aged programs that actually meant something and taught them but also gave them relationships with each other, they would just walk away at that point. They might go to church, but they might just leave because there was nothing for them at this point.

The words of SJM6 seem to sum up the youth ministry. He was well-placed in the youth ministry as a youth in the program and then a small group leader. He answered by stating

There are some youth ministries that are able to grow by having really entertaining programs that are attractive, and that growth may be numeric growth but does not produce deep spiritual lives. This program didn't even have that. (He laughs) It wasn't very exciting, it didn't have the 'excitingness' of other youth ministries.

iii. Data Analysis and Evaluation: What Was Going On



The interviews indicated that the program was not effective in keeping youth in the church. There was no one who made a positive connection between the youth ministry program and retention. The Friday night program, with the concentration on fun and attraction, not only did not appear to be attractive but did not “funnel” anyone into the Sunday morning discipleship group. Nor did this Sunday morning group prepare the youth for long-term Christian living and participation in the church.

QUESTION EIGHT (YOUTH), QUESTION NINE (YOUTH), (YOUTH), QUESTION TWO (ADULT), QUESTION THREE (ADULT)

Questions Eight: *If you attended prior to 2005, Describe your experience of youth group before the program changed in January 2005.*

Question Nine: *What did you see were the key differences before and after the changes?*

Adult Question Two: *Describe the youth group before the program changed in January 2005.*

Adult Question Three: *What did you see were the key differences before and after the changes?*

i. The Interview Questions

My goal with these questions was to hear about the contrasts both immediate and long-term from the changes in the program. I have combined these questions as the answers that were given correspond to each other. This category of questions also aims to find out what led to retention at St. John's. This is another the part of the survey where a number of the participants spoke at a great deal of length.

ii. An Overview of the Answers

There was a great deal of harmony in the answers, including between the adults and the youth. Both agreed that there was an increase in the actual size of the youth ministry. Many stated that there was an increase in the pursuit of spiritual disciplines. There was a great deal of comment on the new community that was formed and the relationships that were now deep, beneficial and evident in the ministry. There was also a large response on the relationships between the leaders and the young people. I will summarize many of their answers in a “before and after” format.

Before

- The Friday night program was generally not seen to be effective in attraction or in keeping the church youth in the church.
- There was disagreement about the enjoyment aspect, some youth enjoyed it, others did not.

- SJM13 (adult) and his wife SJF14 believed that the previous youth group tried to “generate some excitement through get-togethers (combined youth meetings) with other youth groups.” In addition, there was a focus on the “big event” such as camping and mission trips.
- SJM13 called the content and relationships in the youth ministry program “thin.
- SJF5 also said the youth ministry was “trying to keep the kids in the church by entertaining them.”
- SJM8, the staff member who helped plan the Friday evenings, described them as “in house activities in the gym like hide and seek.” He described the nights as very light on spiritual content with “never a Bible talk, never small groups or a prayer time.”

After

- Numerical growth. SJM6, SJM7, SJM9, SJM15, SJM19, SJF23
- The new structure aided in retention (SJM16, SJM19)
- An increase in the practice of spiritual disciplines such as prayer and Bible study (SJF5, SJM7, SJM9, SJM10, SJM16, SJM17, SJM20, SJF23).
- A strong community formed (Adults: SJM9, SJM13, SJM19, SJF23). (Youth: SJF2, SJF3, SJM6, SJM7, SJF12, SJM15, SJM16, SJM17, SJM22).
 - SJF12 described it as, “We actually started talking and getting to know each other rather than being consumers at the entertainment complex.”
 - One youth (SJM17) noted that he felt like he belonged to a “healthy community in a structured environment—this forced us to interact with others.”
- Commitment to each other formed community. SJM7 called it an “incredibly exciting, powerful, organic, intimate community. The intimacy of those relationships was infectious to people and people were “insanely committed to the church and to the faith. There was a huge commitment to seeing a lot of each other.” He called this community a “framework for growth” and a “beautiful picture of the fragrance of Christ.”
- The relationship between the youth leaders and the young people had a substantial positive impact (SJF3, SJF4, SJM15 SJM10 (adult), SJM11 (adult), SJM15, SJF18 (adult)).
- SJM15 commented that his leader became a mentor figure. “I still see him regularly at church and we had coffee a year ago.”

SJM6, reflected on the growth as

There grew a community that was trying to look like Jesus. It was what the church should look like and this was attractive. The ministry wanted to grow Christians before evangelism. When Christians are happy, that is the marker for a healthy community—content Christian hearts.

iii. Data Analysis and Evaluation: What Was Going On

The answers showed the previous program was ineffective at producing Christian growth and unable to retain its members. There was no indication that the previous program built on a dichotomy of evangelism and discipleship was in any way effective. However, the changes established a program that formed a community, centred around spiritual disciplines that brought about immediate numerical growth. In addition, it instilled confidence to invite friends and a conviction that long-term commitment to the Christian faith was important.

QUESTION ELEVEN (YOUTH) QUESTION FIVE (ADULTS)

i. The Interview Question

After changes were made the youth ministry grew and kept the youth that attended—what do you attribute the growth to?

These questions are identical questions asked to the youth who were involved in the program (Question Eleven) and the adults (Question Five). These questions were designed to find out why the group grew numerically. In the natural flow of conversation, I found an interconnectedness with their answers. I will keep this section brief as many of their answers overlapped with Question Eight and Question Nine.

ii. An Overview of Their Answers

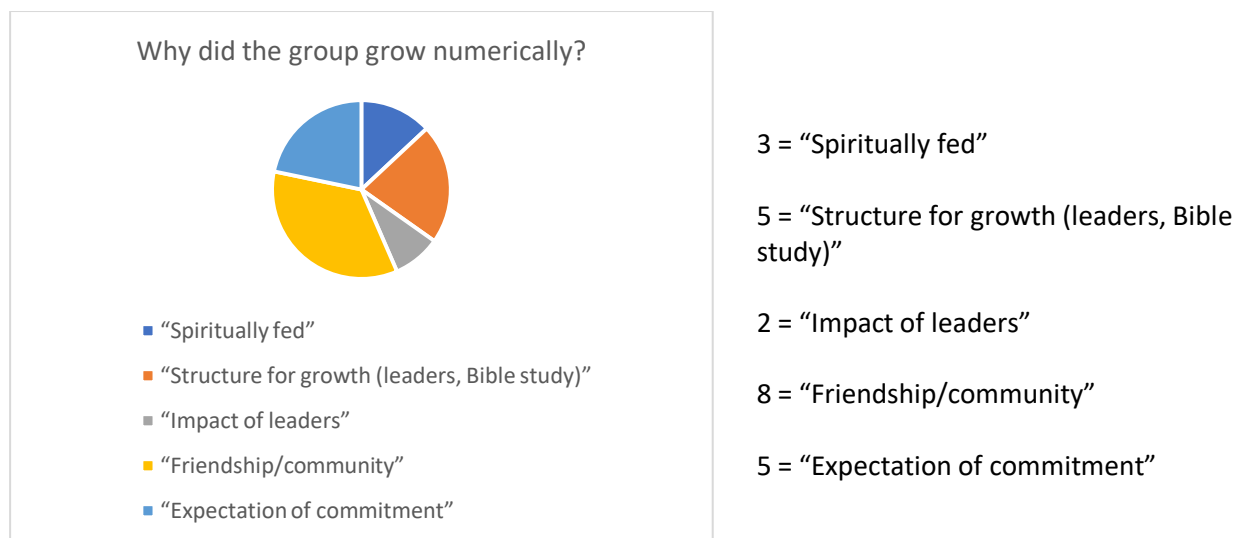


Figure 0.6 Why did the group grow numerically?

In the course of the interview process, a pattern was now beginning to form as these answers focused on the familiar themes of relationships, structure, and spiritual input.

The adults commented on the impact of spiritual needs in the youth were suddenly being met. SJF5 believed that:

Well, I think that just like every human being there was a deep hunger in these youth and they recognised that they needed more. That there was a vacuum in their life. And as they started to come to know Jesus and start started studying the Bible together and they started to commit to this their lives were being transformed.

SJF11 agreed, ascribing it, in part, to the commitment of the leaders. “The leaders were sacrificing and that placed value on it for the kids” was his response. SJM13 believed there was a “strong community” and a “framework for growth” adding, “The small group Bible studies were a good front door as they were relational.” SJM19 answered by saying that a “pattern of ministry was established.” SJM8 agreed, telling me that “The pattern of ministry to young people and leaders was established which created a kind of fruitfulness that is still there 14 years later.”

The youth gave similar answers to the adults citing the impact of relationships with SJM1 believing that “people loved each other.” In addition to this was, according to SJM6, a clear structure and purpose. In his words:

There was this kind of a clear structure. Clarity about what was happening was very obvious and it's something on Sunday for youth group, Friday was Bible study. There was a consistency there.

SJM7 spoke of “kids being gripped with the gospel.” He added, “We weren’t being spoon fed, we were treated like adults and it was challenging and radically different.” SJF12 and SJM17 simply said, “The group was fun!” SJM16, who now works part-time for a church, called it “an integrated model of church growth and Christian living.” He added, “While we didn’t get massive, we kept what we had.”

iii. Data Analysis and Evaluation: What Was Going On

The data shows that a large part of the numerical growth and retention was due to simply, as SJM16 said, “keeping what we had.” This happened because of the elements we have repeatedly seen in this research: community, and, young people being taking Christianity seriously. The group moved away from seeking growth through “fun” but rather found its identity in being “gripped” by the Christian faith. This led not only to retention but to a degree of evangelism as well.

4 Briercree College Student Interviews

Marshall and Rossman have cited that in-depth research is used extensively in qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman 1999:108) and my goal was to have comprehensive conversations with a number of students from the prairies of Canada. Over the course of several weeks in February and

March 2019, I interviewed 15 students and wives of students to find out about their youth ministry experience.

To ensure an equitable and random selection of participants I asked for volunteers through the classes that I teach at Briercrest College. While many of these classes concern youth ministry, one is a general Public Speaking course (which was offered twice and from which three students volunteered). The qualifications for volunteering were threefold: 1 They must have gone to high school in the Canadian prairies. 2 They must have some experience of youth ministry during this time. 3 They must be willing to be interviewed about their experience in youth group. There were two young people whom I asked to be interviewed as they had experienced an attractional youth ministry and were positive about this experience (I had learned this through private conversation.) My hope was to hear their experiences as a counterbalance to some volunteers who may have wanted to participate merely to complain about negative experiences in youth group or to somehow please me.

A number of young people volunteered, and the number was capped at 15 simply due to time constraints. The make-up of the participants was six males and nine females between the ages of 18 and 31. Two of the participants were siblings (sisters), four of the participants were married (two of them with children). I conducted seven interviews individually, one with the two sisters, one with a married couple (who had met at youth group) and one with three people together who did not go to the same youth group.

I have obscured the identity of those interviewed by using key words and numbers and genders giving them categories and that distinguish between the two groups (Marshall & Rossman 1999:155). For the participants from the prairies, I have given them the code PRAIRIE. Following this, I have placed “M” or “F” to delineate whether the person is male or female. Finally, there is a number ascribed at random.

The interviews amounted to around 116 pages of word for word transcriptions. As with the St John’s interviews, the volume of information means I am not able to record every answer given to each question. However, I have attempted once again to give as clear an overview of their answers in the following summaries.

Interview Questions for Briercrest Students

1. Describe your church’s ministry to young people while you were a teenager.
2. What was the number one reason you attended youth group?
3. Did your youth group help you grow in your Christian faith? *[If yes, how and if no, why?]*

4. What events in the youth ministry program did you feel you could invite a nonChurched friend to?
5. Did these events also help you grow in the Christian faith? If yes, how?
6. Where are most of the youth that you went to youth group with, are they still going to church?
7. What do you think are the reasons why those that didn't stay in the church left?

4.1 The Presentation of the Data

QUESTION ONE

i. The Interview Question

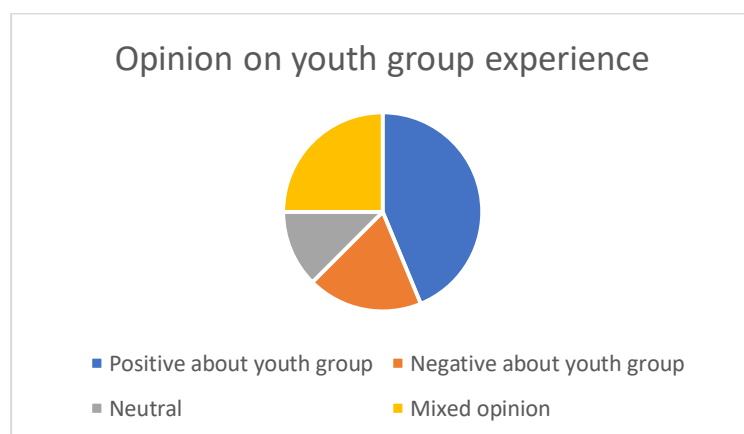
Describe your church's ministry to young people while you were a teenager.

This first question was similar to the first question in the St. John's case study. It was simply designed to open the discussion and let them begin to speak about their experience as well as provide an introduction and overview to the youth ministries represented.

ii. An Overview of the Answers

The Briercrest students answered this question specifically by describing whether they liked the program or not. It did not elicit a deep response about the content of the program.

In the interviews there appeared to be little, if any, dispassionate opinions about the weekly program that the students attended. There was either an enjoyment and appreciation or the opposite opinion. There were some mixed opinions but these were also passionate (one loved the old program and did not like the new program at first). Some of the key words used were: "safe", "enjoyable", "deep", "fun" (used many times), "loved it", "hardly any effort put into it", and "I hated the games."



Of the 15 people interviewed

Seven were positive

Three were negative

Two were neutral

Four had mixed opinions

Figure 0.7 Opinion on youth group experience

Among the positive reasons were: “the chance to hang out with friends from school,” “a really tight group,” and “there were a bunch of us who would typically stay until about midnight just talking and hanging out.”

There were also a number of students who did not enjoy youth group. This was often due to rowdiness or immaturity. PRAIRIEF7 found the games as childish telling me “My friends are swearing and partying and I’m too old for this.” PRAIRIEF3, who admitted to suffering from social anxiety called her youth group as being “Run in a rambunctious way with too many teenagers in way too tiny a space.”

The mixed opinions centered around either a change in leadership (PRAIRIEMM9, PRAIRIEM13) or simply growing tired of the program (PRAIRIEF10). PRAIRIEF10 moved away from a positive opinion in our interview explaining that, after a while, she stopped going to the youth group due to a clash with some of the other youth. She reflected on the experience

I wasn’t having fun anymore ... kids were out of control and rebellious and I was looking after the kids rather than having fun myself. I remember yelling at a group of kids, the leader would discipline the kids but others weren’t able to do it.

iii. Data Analysis and Evaluation: What Was Going On

It was not unexpected that there was a variety of opinions about youth group. Many of the programs had similar content, with every one of the interviewees noting that games were large part of their youth group experience. In addition to this was hangout time and Bible study.

Two students went to youth groups that had a revolving program with one night committed to a different activity such as worship, service, games. In each case, one night was a “bring a friend night.” Two students went to youth groups that underwent a serious change in programming from an attractional model to one committed building up the Christian youth (PRAIRIEF6, PRAIRIEM13). These two students were positive about their experiences and the change in the program although PRAIRIEF6 was initially quite negative about the change.

There were also three people who discussed a program similar to the old one at St. John’s (Shaughnessy) where there was a “fun” night to bring friends and a “serious” night for discipleship.

QUESTION TWO

i. The Interview Question

What was the number one reason you attended youth group?

This question was designed to hear from the students about their motivations for going to youth group. My goal was to see if there was a connection between the regularity of their attendance and the

activities that were offered. In other words, why did they go (was it fun, meaningful, spiritual enriching etc.?)

ii. An Overview of the Answers

In the 15 interviews, there were some clear patterns: some went to make friends, some went because they wanted some help, others because it was fun, and some went simply because it was part of their church. Two went because their parents forced them. In addition, all but three of the interviewees had Christian parents.



Friendships or community = 5

It was their family church = 4

Parent's forced them = 2

Get to know God = 2

Fun and games = 1

Parachurch group only = 1

Figure 0.8 What was the number one reason you attended youth group?

iii. Data Analysis and Evaluation: What Was Going On

The Briercrest students went to youth group for a variety of reasons. It is interesting to note that social reasons featured prominently as did the fact that it was simply part of belonging to a church. For four of the interviewees, it was a place for friendship, a social outlet and somewhere to turn when lonely or going through a “dark time” (PRAIRIEF1, PRAIRIEF5, PRAIRIEM14, PRAIRIEM12).

It is noteworthy that PRAIRIEF6, who went to the youth group that changed from an attractional style to one based on Christian disciplines and community, initially went because her parents forced her to, but said that she “loved the atmosphere” and “this is where I had community.”

While only one person went for the games, there was a large number who enjoyed the “fun” element to the program. PRAIRIEF1, PRAIRIEF3, and PRAIRIEF7 were the only ones who distinctly did not like the games in the program.

QUESTION THREE

i: The Interview Question

Did your youth group help you grow in your Christian faith? [If yes, how and if no, why?]

This question was designed to discover the impact of the youth group on the student’s faith. Was it successful in fostering Christian growth for those who attended?

An Overview of the Answers

There was an even split of responses to this question with five giving a clearly negative response, five clearly positive and five giving a mixed response.



Figure 0.9 Did your youth group help you grow in your Christian faith?

Those who gave a positive answer cited factors such as “it was practical,” and “it was a place I could talk to people about God.” PRAIRIEM14 was very positive about the youth group saying, “It at least created enough of a foundation that when I had a crisis of faith at 17-18 it gave me something to fall back on to.”

Others did not like the unruly conduct of others in the group. However, PRAIRIEF3 did say that it did help to “act like a Christian around nonChristians” due to the rowdy behaviour of those who attended. PRAIRIEF7 was extremely negative about her youth group experience. Feeling like she did not fit in she told me, “Most of the kids in the group were homeschooled and I wasn’t. In addition, the youth leader never talked to me.” Her final words on this question were, “I’d never go alone—if you come

alone it was obvious you were alone—never go alone.”

I was surprised by the lack of clear answers citing the helpfulness of youth group in equipping the students in Christian discipleship. PRAIRIEF5, who was quite positive about her youth group told me in our second interview that “I checked my diary and wrote that I enjoyed the games but wanted more emphasis on Bible stuff.” PRAIRIEF10 and PRAIRIEM9 admitted to “zoning out” during the Bible studies. PRAIRIEF11 admitted that she did not seek to live out what was being taught and would go back to youth group for the games each week. PRAIRIEM12 summed up his youth group experience by saying, “Prayer was not a good experience and I didn’t understand until I came to Briercrest why the Bible mattered or what Christianity meant.”

iii. Data Analysis and Evaluation: What Was Going On

It could be expected that a young person would naturally gravitate towards an energetic program with other teenagers. However, while a number of the students enjoyed the program, I was surprised by the lack of clarity concerning the spiritual impact on those whom I interviewed.

While two students discussed their eager involvement in youth group, they also admitted to not being impacted through the spiritual activities with one of them leaving after a while. One student credited her Christian growth as coming not from the youth program but from her mother and “learning to study the Bible through a computer program home school curriculum.” Another student, who was deeply committed to his friends in youth group admitted to “zoning out” during Bible study.

The answers indicated to me that, for most of the students, youth group was an enjoyable place but did little in the way of preparing them for long-term Christian life and ministry. I am left to wonder, did the “enjoyable” side of the program hinder the promotion of spiritual growth?

QUESTION FOUR

i. The Interview Question

What events in the youth ministry program did you feel you could invite a nonChurched friend to?

This question is designed to find out what specific events or programs the students invited their friends to and if the program was successful in attracting newcomers.

ii. An Overview of the Answers





Figure 0.10 Did you invited friends to youth group?

The answers were mixed with nine inviting friends and six who did not. A number of students admitted to not having many friends outside of youth group whereas PRAIRIEF10 and PRAIRIEF11 “recruited like mad.”

iii. Data Analysis and Evaluation: What Was Going On

This question was generally interpreted to mean “Did you invite friends?” rather than my desired goal of finding out exactly what events were organized for unchurched youth and the success of these events. However, the majority of the students felt comfortable inviting their friends and there was a willingness to bring others. PRAIRIEM13 said that he invited a number of his friends and “seven or eight of them came.” Many students went to youth groups who were desirous of growth with several of them running regular (or monthly) “bring your friends games night.”

I found it interesting that some students admitting to not have many friends they could invite to youth group (PRAIRIEM4, PRAIRIEF5). This would have a clear impact on a Funnel group that has a dedicated program for friends. If a young person does not have any friends to invite, how would this impact them? Would they stop going? What about the role of youth group in providing friends?

It is also interesting that PRAIRIE 6, who went to a group that changed the program to a more “serious one” found it difficult to invite friends to the group “because it was so spiritual.” This was an interesting answer that leads me to wonder, how can a group with a “spiritual identity” also effectively reach out?

The youth groups that were represented appeared to have a mixed success rate among the students I interviewed. While several of the programs appeared to have relatively strong numbers, no students indicated large numeric growth through the events designed for nonchurch youth. While the majority

of these groups were committed to attracting through fun activities, it did not produce numerical growth as described in Questions Six and Seven.

QUESTION FIVE

i. The Interview Question

Did these events also help you grow in the Christian faith? If yes, how?

This question is designed to discover whether the events designed to bring friends to were helpful or unhelpful in the Christian faith of the regular members of the youth group. This question proved to be interpreted as “Did youth group help you grow?” rather than “Did the specific nights designed for those outside of the church help you?” During the interview process, it became apparent that this question was very similar to Question Three (Did your youth group help you to grow in your Christian faith?).

ii. An Overview of the Answers

PRAIRIEM15 did find the events helpful, although he was not a Christian at the time, as he himself was being evangelised. “They helped me with showing respect and kindness to others” was his answer. Three students did not find them helpful.

Of the three that did not find them helpful, PRAIRIEM4 believed his Christian growth came from growing up in a Christian home. PRAIRIEF3 did not find these events helpful due to “social anxiety.” She added, “I wanted to grow out of it, but it was torture.” PRAIRIEM14, who was very positive about his youth group experience, did not find the outreach events helpful to his Christian growth. “So high on fun content, low on spiritual content” was his recollection.

iii. Data Analysis and Evaluation: What Was Going On

In retrospect, there was little new input from the interviewees about this question due to its similarity with Question Three.

QUESTION SIX

i. The Interview Question

Where are most of the youth that you went to youth group with, are they still going to church?

This question, along with Question Seven was designed to find out about longevity and retention among youth in their church.

ii. An Overview of the Answers

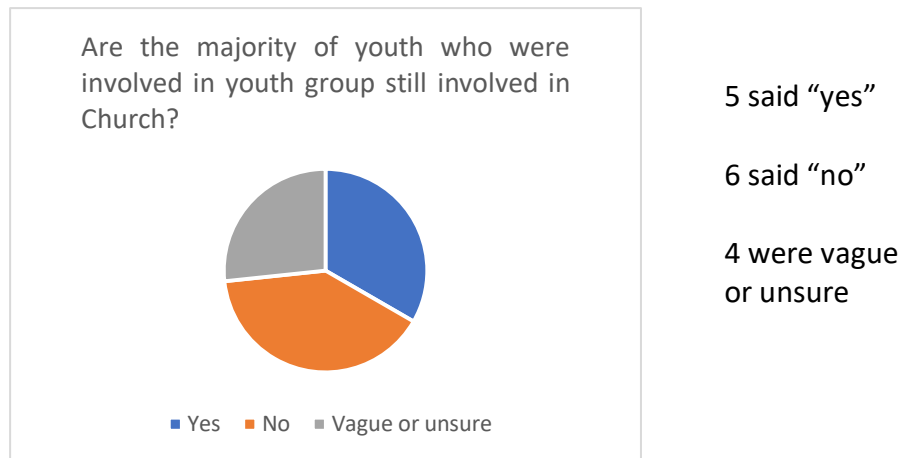


Figure 0.11 Are the majority of youth who were involved in youth group still involved in Church?

iii. Data Analysis and Evaluation: What Was Going On

While the division between “yes they are still going to church” and “they are no longer involved in church” appears to be fairly close, it must be noted that PRAIRIEF6 and PRAIRIEM14, who both said “yes,” went to youth groups that had moved from an attractional focus to one focused on spiritual development. This leads me to believe that the groups who focused on numerical growth, did not see this occur. There were also a number of students who said that those young people from “churched homes” or had Christian parents attended church today more regularly than those who came from outside of the church (PRAIRIEM4, PRAIRIEF10, PRAIRIEF11).

PRAIRIEM13 was one student who was not only clear about the majority still being involved in the church but very positive about the retention in his youth ministry stating that

The typical stats aren’t applicable to us, we are outliers. Many of those in the group are at YWAM or a local Bible college. My youth leader is a follow-up guy and we have a great young adults’ group and connect the younger groups to the older group well. You could say we have defied the statistics of falling away. This is because of the way the youth pastor runs things.

It is my evaluation that, from the evidence, PRAIRIEM13’s youth group was indeed an outlier. It is noteworthy that in our interview he explained that his youth leader had changed the program away from a “hype time” to a program designed to nurture spiritual growth. It appears that the majority of youth programs here who were committed to reaching the outsider were not successful in retaining the majority of their youth.

QUESTION SEVEN

i. The Interview Question

What do you think are the reasons why those that didn’t stay in the church left?

This question was designed to discover the what reasons the Briercrest students gave as to why youth had left the church.

ii. An Overview of the Answers



Figure 0.12 Why people left the youth group/Christian faith

There were numerous responses to the question of “why did they leave.” Answers included the “desire to party,” and, “a lack of leader care,” and “they weren’t committed to God.” Others believed it was due to “not having a Christian family.”

PRAIRIEM15, who noted that most of his group did not stay in the church, believed that many left because, “It’s easy to fall into that drinking crowd, transient, oil money, bars” (“oil money” comes from lucrative jobs mining for gas and oil). PRAIRIEF1 said “People got to high school and started partying. A lot partied and then got married and some settled down and came back to church.” PRAIRIEF6’s opinion that many left the group because “they didn’t want to be told what to do. They felt the group was too serious about the faith and they “couldn’t live my life like I wanted to.” PRAIRIEF10 told me that a failure in retention was often due to whether the youth leader “cared for the youth.” Some leaders were there to “run youth group” rather than “investing in lives.”

PRAIRIEF5 believed that many of the youth left simply because they

were’n’t totally committed, they weren’t from church and they weren’t there for the reasons I was—I’m trying to be a good Christian and hear from God. They were there because there were games.

iii. Data Analysis and Evaluation: What Was Going On

Given the data cited much earlier in this paper (Kinnaman, *Hemorrhaging Faith*) many of the answers given were not surprising. What was noteworthy from the answers was a lack of acknowledgment that the youth groups did not prepare youth for long-term Christian living. This did not appear to be in the minds of the Briercrest students. I was left wondering if it is just assumed by most youth group members that the majority will not stay Christian. Given the fact that the Funnel is built on a steady decrease in attendance, has this shaped the minds of those who go to youth group that the majority simply do not stay with the Christian faith?

5. Key Words and Themes in the Case Study and the Interviews

In the interviews with St. John's and with the Briercrest students there were a number of key themes, patterns and words that occurred which were relevant to my thesis question. These were identified as I made notes during the interview process and reviewing these notes and transcripts. Using the word for word interview transcripts I was able to highlight words that were repeated and appeared to be important themes and patterns in the experiences of the people at St John's and those from the prairies and give exact details of word counts and uses.

i. "Games"

Briercrest

In my interviews with the Briercrest students, the word "game" or "games" was used one hundred and eighty-one times. It was used negatively by PRAIRIEF1, PRAIRIEF7. It was used either in a neutral way to describe contents within the program (e.g. PRAIRIEM15, "We had a monthly games night,") or it was used positively (PRAIRIEF11, "This is just a cool event that you can go to play games with kids to have some fun"). It was used once to describe an activity to help a small group bond (PRAIRIEF2). PRAIRIEF10 and PRAIRIEF11, the two sisters who attended a number of youth groups used the word nineteen times between them. PRAIRIEM12 used the word nine times.

PRAIRIEF5 had a mixed description of the games. On the one hand, she was positive when they occurred among a group of committed friends

The thing is when you have a committed group of people that were committed to following God the games were a blast. It was a good time because we were all friends and we were playing games with our friends and it was a Christian community.

However, she a negative view of games when they moved the focus from spiritual activities,

Some of us got frustrated with games sometimes...I wanted to do the Bible study stuff and then the other kids are like oh I don't want to the Bible study stuff and it was polarized.

PRAIRIEM12 had a similar response,

I remember one game we did where we put pantyhose on our head and we started eating a banana. And you had to spit the banana out through the pantyhose which of course you can't do so then it's smearing all over your face. There's just a lot of games like that. Back at that point a lot of the youth just stopped coming a lot of them kind of gave up on the faith.

When referring to a new volunteer who took over the group he said,

We kept trying to come and it wasn't nearly as Bible... there weren't any more topical [studies] and here's how to learn to do this in the Bible there is a message...but it was mostly just games.

The word "friend" or "friends" was used 52 times. It often appeared in a similar place to the word "game." It was used by three people to describe games as part of a bring a friend night.

Somehow there was a connection in people's minds that the games were somehow related to friends, either to create friendships or to create a group to bring friends to

St John's

A strong contrast to the Prairie interviews the word "game" occurs only 26 times in the St John's interviews. Of the 26 times, four of them refer to sporting teams outside of church, three refer to another youth group and one time refers to a combined church event. Of the remaining 18 times, 13 refer to games as an activity in the program prior to the changes. For example,

SJM17 And then I do remember like our Friday night games. Where a bit more there was a bit more game oriented. Fun and games oriented where the Sunday morning was almost more of the Bible study.

The other five references to games that were associated with the new program were used to describe activities with spiritual content (e.g. a Bible game). SJM22 referring to the new program said

I think the idea of like a program with all these different pieces was probably new. As far as like ... we're gonna do a mixer now .. we're going to do a Bible game now ... we're gonna do a talk now or discussion groups or or question and answer time or all these different segments that [were] brought in.

In a conversation with two St John's youth they spoke of games in a teaching setting,

SJM16: [There were] opportunities to have a chance to lead an activity yourself. I remember that being a huge thing. Like the opportunity to be in leadership.

SJM17 Yeah.

SJM16 For sure.

SJM17 And sit and listen to a talk is also a skill to sit and actually listen and then often we would get into groups and chat about that or think about what it meant. I mean it's kind of a classic teaching scenario you know. What are a few different ways to express the point of this text right? My point is this passage one of them is Ken or Julie doing a talk or some other youth leader. One of them is doing skits, how do you express this idea in the sketch? How do you express this idea even in a game?

SJM16 How does Bible express this idea like memorizing verses?

SJM17 Yeah yeah that's so. And those things were fun.

ii. "Fun"

Briercrest

Fun was a word used 78 times by a number of the Briercrest students (PRAIRIEF5, PRAIRIEF6, PRAIRIEF8, PRAIRIEM9, PRAIRIEF10, PRAIRIEF11, PRAIRIEM12, PRAIRIEM14, PRAIRIEM15). It was used quite often in connection with the word "games."

St. John's

While the word "games" was used sparsely in the St. John's interviews the word "fun" is referred to 60 times in 15 of the 23 interviews. In 20 of its uses, it was used to describe the former program or by way of contrast. For example, SJF5's statement "The church was trying to draw the kids with fun activities like the world did." SJM7's comment, "When I look back on it most of the elements were centred on fun." Approximately 40 times it was used to describe the new program. Examples of this include, SJF14 "my leader was fun," SJF23 "But while they were having fun they were learning Scripture and learning about the power of prayer."

"Games" was only used four times in relation to the word "fun", three times describing the content of the previous program and one time where SJM15 was describing playing chess and poker before starting the weekly Bible study (after the changes of 2005).

iii. "Commitment" and "Community"

Briercrest

The word commit/commitment occurs seven times in the Briercrest interviews. Six of those times by one participant (PRAIRIEF5.) She used the word to describe people being committed to the faith, "they were really committed to following God and learning about the Bible and spiritual practices," and "I don't think they were entirely committed to the deeper aspects of it." Once she uses the word in close proximity to the word "community,"

When you have a committed group of people that were committed to following God the games were a blast...it was a good time because we were all friends and we were playing games with our friends and it was a Christian community.

The other person to use the word "commitment" spoke about her group after the youth ministry changed to a discipleship program and refers to those who "didn't want to go that weren't committed to learning about Jesus and learning about what it meant to be in this in this group."

St John's

In contrast to the Briercrest interviews, the word "commit" or "commitment" was used over one hundred and ten times in the interviews with St. John's. It was used negatively once to describe the old

program (SJF4 speaking of her uncertainty as to what the Friday night group was actually about) and it was used positively in the vast number of instances. Where it occurred negatively it was almost entirely by the parents referring to families that rejected the new style of program. The word “community” occurs 59 times. It occurs 17 times positively and this is in connection to the new program. The word occurs 21 times in close proximity to the word “commitment.” SJM22 expresses this,

A sense of commitment as well to the group and to the people that Ken and Julie instilled I think very strongly. Yeah those like there was an investment and a sense of, of people and in the program and in one another as a community.

iv. “Leader”

Briercrest

One word that occurred repeatedly in the Briercrest interviews was the word “leader.” All but three interviewees used it multiple times (PRAIRIEM4 did not use it and PRAIRIEF7 used it once). Of the others that used it multiple times PRAIRIEF1 and PRAIRIEF3 used it 18 times. PRAIRIEF10 and PRAIRIEF11 used it 29 times. The word was used positively for leaders who cared and invested in the young people. However, it was also used a number of times negatively for leaders who had little to no interest in the youth.

St. John’s

The word “leader” was used 261 times by the St. John’s interviewees. It was a common idea in the minds of those interviewed. The general use was very positive as in SJF5’s use

And just hearing the Gospel and sharing with and having a leader who cares for them prayed for them and would meet them and I think another thing is that there was a real emphasis on the leader would really be committed to these youth and work together usually that same leader would be with them from grade seven to grade twelve and so There was a great bond and the caring and if they had struggles they could call their leader. They could meet with them.

v. “Parent” (Briercrest)

The word “parent” was used a number of times in the Briercrest interviews. Four people used the word to describe the fact that they were “forced” to go by their parents. However, it was significant that many of the participants used it to describe as a reason for others attending youth group or remaining in the faith.

vi. “Cohesion/cohesive” (St. John’s)

A word that occurred with three of the St. John’s participants was “cohesion.” While this is not a recurring word it is interesting to note since it is a unique word used to describe relationships. This word was used negatively about the program before the change (SJM6 “There was nothing cohesive to

them about being there.”). It was used positively to describe the youth program after the change (SJM9, “There was cohesiveness within the youth.”).

6. Interpreting the Data: Conclusions from St. John’s (Shaughnessy) Case Study and the Briercrest Interviews as it Relates to the Research Problem

While there is no stated philosophy of youth ministry that I can find in the records of St. John’s, it appears to have been based on the Funnel Model of ministry or a modified understanding of this model. There was the Friday evening program designed to be fun and for newcomers to join, and there was the Sunday morning discipleship program designed to teach the Bible and take young people deeper into the Christian faith. However, the structure appears to have been organized with little strategic thought with neither the Friday evening nor the Sunday morning program proving to be effective in the minds of those I interviewed. While it may have been modeled intentionally or unintentionally on Duffy Robbins’ funnel, it was not producing the results that Robbins would advocate. There are no records, written or verbal, of a young person being attracted to the Friday night group (Robbins’ Come Level) and then moving into the Sunday morning group (Robbins’ Grow, Disciple, or Develop Level). In fact, as we have seen repeatedly, what was left was a numerical pyramid; as the youth grew older, there were less of them in church or youth group with little to no one remaining.

For the Briercrest students, I observed three clear patterns that emerged as to the nature of the youth group meeting. The first was that six students indicated that youth group was directed toward the nonChristian young person (PRAIRIEF3, PRAIRIEM4, PRAIRIEF7, PRAIRIEF10, PRAIRIEF11, PRAIRIEM15). This reflects the primary platform of the Funnel Model but neglected the necessary follow-up stages that are designed to produce Christian maturity (and evangelism). The second was that three students went to groups that had two different youth group times; one for discipleship and one for those outside of the church (PRAIRIEF1, PRAIRIEM9, PRAIRIEM14). This does reflect, in part, the Funnel Model in that there was the Come Level and, at least in theory, a Develop or Disciple Level. The third was that two students went to programs that had a significant shift in focus away from the attractional towards one that was directed towards building Christian maturity first, rather than reaching those outside of the church (PRAIRIEF6 and PRAIRIEM13). As we shall see later on in this section, the two students who attended these youth programs were positive about the changes.

My interviews of the Briercrest students revealed that, while there was a difference of opinion as to the enjoyment of the program, the majority of the Briercrest students indicated that their program was, in the end, not effective in reaching new believers and then retaining them for long-term participation in the Christian faith. There is little to suggest in my research that the use of entertainment was

successful in either attracting new young people to the church nor in keeping them involved in the church, even if the program was “fun.” The program that was in place at St. John’s (Shaughnessy) prior to 2005 was clearly not successful and, the division of evangelism (Friday nights) and discipleship (Sunday mornings) was an unhelpful one. In fact, it seems to have contributed to the lack of faith formation and spiritual longevity at St. John’s. Similarly, there is little to show that the use of the Attractional Model was effective in the ministries represented by the Briercrest students. It is significant that a number of the St. John’s youth enjoyed the new program and spoke of it positively.

It is interesting that, while there are vast cultural, ecclesiastical, and geographical differences between St. John’s and the churches represented by the Briercrest students, there were a number of close similarities in the youth ministry program. From the activities that were organized to the lack of apparent long-term success, to the two-pronged evangelistic and discipleship program, there were clear parallels between these two worlds. In addition to this was the fact that a number of students enjoyed these programs, even though there was an apparent lack of success associated with them. I wonder if that is where youth ministry now stands, we are simply satisfied if there is a temporal enjoyment of the program rather than a long-term spiritual gain.

6.1 Was “Fun” Successful in Attracting and Did it Aid in Retention?

The results from the case study and the interviews appear to indicate that the use of fun was not successful in producing numerical growth nor did it aid in retention. I find it important to note that, with the Briercrest students, the clear majority of them indicated that they were positive toward the fun aspect of the program (PRAIRIEF5, PRAIRIEF6, PRAIRIEF8, PRAIRIEM9, PRAIRIEF10, PRAIRIEF11, PRAIRIEM12, PRAIRIEM14, PRAIRIEM15,). It is also interesting that, while they were positive, for all of them except two (PRAIRIEF6 and PRAIRIEM13), there was no alternative program to contrast it to. For these two, there was a positive reflection on the new program compared to the previous attractional one, especially in the areas of Christian growth and numerical retention.

In the St. John’s interviews, there were only two who were positive about the Friday night program (and this came with some reservations). While many of the Briercrest students enjoyed the games and the “attractive” program, as stated earlier, there was no evidence that showed that the games and attractive program were successful over the long-term. In other words, neither PRAIRIEF11, who thought the games were “cool,” nor PRAIRIEF6, who was upset when the program changed away from an attractional program to one geared to building Christian disciples, offered any comments that would show that the games were effective, they simply enjoyed the program. There were others who clearly found the games to be ineffective (PRAIRIEF1, PRAIRIEF7, PRAIRIEM13). In comparing

and contrasting this with St. John's we see that those students who were involved in the previous attractional program much preferred the new program.

6.2 The Assumption of Entertainment

It is important to note the frequency that games were mentioned by the Briercrest students as a key part of the program—it was referred to by every single person I interviewed. While someone may expect certain program characteristics to be associated with a Christian program, prayer, for example, it ought to be somewhat surprising that games are were so prevalent in the Briercrest student's recollections. In fact, I would go so far as to say that the role of games and entertainment appears to be assumed and a “given” in the youth programs that were represented in my research.

I found it interesting that PRAIRIEF10 and PRAIRIEF11 discussed how they went to four different youth groups, three in the one small town and a fourth in another small town and each of these games appeared to have a very similar program, with games appearing to be the centerpiece. In my research, this appears to be a common factor in all of the youth programs. The trust in entertainment and activities that are deemed by the leadership to be enjoyable also appears to transcend geography and culture as this was also the staple of the Friday night program in Vancouver. This indicates that the Come Level of the Funnel, whether named or known, may have a wide influence on Canadian youth ministry programs and may be seen primarily in the use of games. It appears as though the desire is that these games will be seen to be attractive and make it easier for new people to enjoy the program. In the interviews there appeared to be two opinions on the role of games in youth ministry “I liked them,” or “I hated them.” I could not find anyone who had made the connection to whether games were helpful in moving someone down the funnel into a level that developed Christian maturity as is Duffy Robbins' intent.

It is also important to note that, while the program at St. John's moved away from an attractional one, the new program was never referred to as not being fun. SJF11 stated that her son always had fun at the program as did SJF12 and SJM16. In fact, in SJM16's mind, the fun either stemmed from or was a by-product of the core activities (such as Bible study) and the community that was shared. None of the St. John's people that I interviewed ever commented on the new program not being fun. In fact, it seemed to be quite the opposite. SJM15 described in detail his first experience as a grade seven boy joining the new youth program

I remember it a lot more vividly than Club 67 (the previous group that met irregularly for the youth in grades six and seven), it was way bigger than Club 67. There were exciting new Bible studies ... a bunch of boys my own age.

On a final note, while the idea of games was discussed by all of the Briercrest students, there was a similar word or concept used by all but two of the St. John's participants. This word was "commitment."

6.3 Commitment

With the St. John's interviewees, it is important to note the frequency that commitment was cited. As stated earlier in this chapter, everyone whom I interviewed from St. John's raised the issue. This was in sharp contrast to the Briercrest students where it was only spoken of rarely. PRAIRIE5 raised it in a number of different contexts ("we were super committed to God" and "I don't think they were all that committed to the deeper aspects of things.") She also spoke of it when describing the example of her parents who were committed to the church and did not want to leave. PRAIRIE6 spoke of some youth who were "dedicated to the group." Other than this, it did not appear to be relevant at all in most of the minds of the young people from the prairies. There was very little discussion of it concerning the weekly program, small groups or to anyone associated in the youth ministry.

It is important to note that for St. John's (Shaughnessy) the idea of commitment appeared to bring a positive response however, with certain qualifications. The young people who participated in the program were quite positive, as were those newcomers who joined. However, the parents who were surveyed, while very positive towards the new program, raised this issue of those youth who did not make the transition. SJF18 was aware that there were other families in the church we found it difficult to make a decision to join the new program. She recalled

There were families who really struggled with the commitment idea because it interfered with other commitments that they had. You know, whether it was figure skating or soccer or hockey or whatever and I understood their struggle.

She spoke to me at length about her perceptions on how other parents felt about the shift in expectations,

I can see that it could have been a very difficult thing for parents who have a kid who really likes a particular thing. But the only time that they can do it is at x y z time and so then they have to make that choice. And what you required them to make was the Kingdom choice. And ... and that I think this was the right thing. But for a teenager, they don't have that perspective necessarily. It's not theirs yet. It would have been really hard I think for some kids to say, "Oh crap, I can't ... I can't go to this league or I can't go to that level of dance whatever because somebody's making me go to youth group.

SJM10 believed that some parents were bothered by the inconvenience that the call of commitment required. "A shower of cold water was poured on them" were his words. However, he told me that he sympathized with them. SJM13 noted that there was some discomfort felt by parents over the change from a program where the kids could have a choice over which program to attend to one that now

may, in some cases conflict with things like a family dinner on a Sunday afternoon. He also stressed that what was being required of the youth was not reflected among the adults. “What is expected of the kids was not expected of the parents and the church had not anticipated the conflict.” SJF23 echoed these comments telling me that she had heard of some conflict over youth group versus family dinners. She felt that some of the parents wanted a “drop-in commitment to youth group.” SJM19 saw that the expectations were similar to sports teams and this caused tension with the parents. “Here’s another commitment causing pressure in my life” is what he believed some parents felt. SJM8, who was the interim leader of the group before Julie and my arrival, told me that it was hard for him as the changes brought “discomfort and a shaking up of the youth group.” In the past youth ministry program, the youth group appeared to have little buy-in or commitment on the part of the youth. SJM13, one of the parents, commented that, “while there was commitment on the part of the youth leader, the program didn’t emphasize commitment—it was a drop-in situation, the leaders didn’t know who’d show up week to week—there was not an emphasis on commitment.” He then drew a parallel to the adult services telling me that the lack of commitment from the youth reflected the church

The same is true of the adult services—there aren’t many churches who do preach commitment—what happened with the youth was part of the bigger picture. We came from a small congregation, when someone wasn’t there you knew! At St Johns you could come and go with no expectation of commitment.

The youth that I interviewed did not seem to share the tension or conflict when it came to the request for commitment to the group. In fact, they appeared to me to be uniformly positive due to the outcomes that came through this commitment. SJM15 commented that the need to be committed was “emphasized” and,

I realized the importance of Christianity in my life, this was something that took priority over other things that might conflict ... it was an important part of my identity and I needed to start thinking about my life through that lens—it was serious. This was an actual group of people with consequences.

He added that others were “responding to the challenge as something important—people took it seriously.” He cited the numerical growth that immediately occurred telling me,

I didn’t know how many were coming outside of the St. John’s system but people who were coming once in a while were now coming every week and that made it easier to get to know each other and make friends. This was a huge part.

For SJM15 this led to, in his words, “a deep sense of loyalty” even when he moved up to the older youth group years later and felt that the older group did not allow him to fit in as readily as he saw himself on the periphery of the group. SJM1 told me that the change to the program “quickly generated a group identity—we knew who we are and what we are going to do.” He saw this as an immediate positive. SJF4 said a similar thing telling me “a group identity formed.” SJF3, who joined

us a few years after the change in the program said, “this group was different to my old youth group.”

As a newcomer who had been to other youth groups, I found her thoughts insightful

It felt like people wanted me there. And ... and it was interesting too, like ... I liked what we were talking about ... like I ... I really wanted to talk about God and because I ... I guess I'd always had faith and a relationship with God but I had rarely found anyone to share that with. So, it's just ... it was exciting. And I also think I just saw people loving each other really well like I remember thinking to myself “that kid who had been bullied at my school and here he's like welcomed and accepted and valued in this community” and just wanting more of that I guess wanting more like that myself.

SJM6 also commented on the immediate response from the youth telling me

There was a call to commitment. And, as I've thought about that in reflection, I think there were many young people who were sort of lukewarm. And when the call to commitment came it was decision time. And some decided “this isn't for me.” And for those who decided “it's for me,” they really came back and there was this committed group. So, there was this sense of “we're here together and we're committed to this thing.”

SJM1 echoed much of what SJM6 said telling me that “the call to commitment was polarizing, they either bought in or didn't.” He told me that the implementation of weekly Bible studies meant that people either had to buy in or not.” This made people feel uncomfortable but often in a good way” were his reflections.

Many of the participants commented on the impact of the leadership team on the overall commitment and community of the youth group. SJM7 said that “the center was the Bible study group of leaders who led the youth group. The intimacy was infectious. New people came and saw that we loved each other.” SJM9 also commented on this telling me that “leadership sets the tone.” SJM13 noted that the leadership from the volunteers “required substantial commitment to each other and then to the program.” SJM10 also commented on this stating that he, as a parent was amazed at the commitment of the youth leaders despite the cost of time and potential harm to their university studies (most of the volunteer youth leaders were university students).

It is my interpretation of the research that the Funnel works against the development of commitment to a church's youth program.

6.4 Community

There appeared to be little to no community in the St. John's program prior to the changes of 2005. In addition, there seemed to be a very small degree of commitment to the program. The Friday evening and Sunday morning did little more than foster either a drop-in mentality (to the Friday night program) or, in the case of Sunday morning, it may have simply functioned as an alternative to church. Any commitment on the part of those I interviewed was due to the fact that “I was a Christian and therefore

I went to church” or “My parents forced me to go.” The change of 2005 clearly brought about a wholesale change of attitude and commitment for many of the St. John’s youth. In addition, the topic of commitment brought with it an interesting response. As noted earlier, the students themselves found the call to commitment as one that was followed with a number of positive outcomes that came from it, the most important being the formation of community and strong relationships. It was through this shared commitment that “we actually had to get to know one another” commented SJM17.

SJM7’s comments shine a light on what was happening after the changes. He describes relationships within the group as “infectious” and in his mind, newcomers “experienced being welcomed into this incredibly tight-knit group of people.” Compare this to the comments of SJM6 who, describing the outreach of the old program said, “my friends never wanted to come back the second time. There was nothing cohesive about being there.” SJM17 describes the relationship of mission and identity by saying that he “organically” invited new people to any type of gathering—there was no need for a special “bring a friend night.” In his words, “It wasn’t just some great community, it was grounded in scripture and Bible study and pretty rigorous frequent Bible studies. We were really wrestling with God’s word ... it was just very different from anything the world would see.” He described people “experiencing this group” and not only coming back but bringing a friend as well. SJM16’s words are reflective of this organic combination of identity and mission

There’s something about the new youth (program) that was attractive. A group of people who were happy to be there, loved being there were committed to being there. And there was something sticky about that. I also think there was a clear Christian message. And I guess we believe that God has put this eternity in people’s hearts. When there is truth being spoken in a winsome and clear way that’s going to be attractive in people as well. There was no BS about what we were doing. Like it was Christian. A Christian community based around the gospel.

The missional engagement for the youth of St. John’s became part and parcel of their identity, and, in order to effectively reach out to their nonChristian friends they wanted to bring them to their Christian community where there was an “organic” reflection of the Christian faith, it was in this spiritual community where effective evangelism occurred. This program, had in effect, become “attractational.”

The Briercrest students who were interviewed clearly were impacted both positively and negatively by the relationships or lack of them as experienced in the group. In other words, if the group was friendly, not characterized by exclusive subgroups (cliques), there was a greater degree of enjoyment.

PRAIRIEF7’S experience of youth group was quite negative. I have cited her words earlier, but they are noteworthy, “I’d never go alone (to youth group), if you were alone it was obvious you were alone. Never go alone.” Similarly, PRAIRIEF6 felt that her youth group was not friendly. Even though she enjoyed the games and, was upset when the youth leader changed to the program to be less games oriented and more focused on Bible teaching, she told me that the group, before the change, “was cliquy and not being open, it felt like a random high school event.” This is interesting given the

Funnel Model's explicit desire to be attractive.

PRAIRIEM15 was going to youth group as a self-confessed atheist. What caused the “big change” in his words was not youth group but a two-week youth mission run by a Saskatchewan Bible College.

I saw that they believed in community no matter what. They would be playing in the park and invite people to join them. That's when I started seeing community reaching people. I gave my life to God at 17 that week.

This caused PRAIRIEM15 to see youth group in a different light. He spoke of two youth leaders who would meet with a group of youth every week and tell them to “always ask questions. If they didn't know the answers, they would look them up for next week. They never forgot us or let us down.” One leader in particular, had an impact on PRAIRIEM15. “He was a leader, honest, blunt, funny, down to earth. I respected him.”

6.5 The Leader as One Who Cares and is Committed

It is evident from the case study and the Briercrest interviews that the impact of a leader had significant consequences both positively and negatively. From a positive standpoint, a leader who was committed to and cared about the youth played an essential role in retention. Specific words and phrases used were, “he was our youth group dad,” “he poured into me,” “invested,” “he showed me that he loved and cared for me” and “genuinely cared” indicated that for many of the Briercrest students, the caring input of a committed leader was a major factor in their spiritual development. In further correspondence via email, PRAIRIEM9 wrote to me about the impact of youth leaders on his spiritual development him (mudding is four-wheel driving through mud and water).

The first youth group I attended was at my home church. I enjoyed it for the most part until I entered into senior high. Our youth pastor was a great guy and I have nothing against him. However, I no longer was looking forward to attending the youth group. Our youth pastor was so concerned with damaging something or someone getting hurt that our activities became less and less enjoyable. Many of us that were in high school felt like we were being treated as though we were still in elementary school. There is much more I could say about this youth group, but I will leave it at that. My brother and me then decided to switch to a youth group that was at a rural church in Rhineland, SK. We immediately saw a difference in the youth pastor and the atmosphere that this youth group entailed. Our new youth pastor kept biblical teaching at the center of youth group and we still had fun! My brother and me honestly didn't expect these two things to go hand in hand. After youth group we would usually go mudding in our trucks and our youth pastor would almost always join us in his old Ford Bronco. He knew how to keep our youth group centered around Christ and he would always go the extra mile to make us feel valued. All the while allowing us to be teenagers, which resulted in broken church couches and windows, trucks stuck in the mud and memories that will impact me forever.

Similarly, it was evident that the care of a leader was of critical concern for St. John's (Shaughnessy) as this was discussed numerous times by the youth and the parents. SJM10 attributed the growth to the

care of the leaders. When contrasting the new program to the previous one SJM8, who was one of the interim leaders, said that “It should’ve been no surprise when no one showed up (to a Friday night social gathering) as there was very little relationship between the leaders and the kids.” This appears to have been corrected at St. John’s with a structure that was put into place facilitated this care and nurture.

6.6 The Negative Impact of a Youth Leader Who Does Not Care, or Departs

Conversely, when leaders either did not care or there was little commitment on the part of the leaders there was a negative impact. This is clear in the interview with PRAIRIEM9 who spoke of a leader who did not seem to care all that much for them or the program. PRAIRIEF7 reflected that “my youth pastor never talked to me, I didn’t know him.” PRAIRIEF10 recalled that

Thinking about it, as unfair as it sounds, a lot of the youth pastors in the groups I went to didn’t put a lot of care into the kids that came to youth group. There were there to run youth group and not investing in lives.

She commented on one youth group that she went to, telling me that, due to the fact that she came from a Christian home, her perception was that the youth leader was more concerned with the nonchurched youth in the group. In her words, “no one cared for us because they would say we were okay.” PRAIRIEF3 described her youth leader as “quiet and timid and youth railroaded him but he didn’t do anything.” She continued by telling me that she experienced bullying in youth group and her youth leaders “were a problem as they wouldn’t stop me being bullied verbally.” In fact, she remembered other youth being bullied with little that was done about it.

At one stage in my interview with PRAIRIEF1 appeared to me to become angry as she related an experience, cited earlier in this paper, that she had in one of the youth groups that she attended.

At YOUTH GROUP NAME ... that one made me bitter. It got me angry and was very disappointing. One of the leaders was very close with all of the girls in my class—she had known them since they were little. However, she never spoke a word to me even though I went to her house. The study was on why it was a sin to wear make-up ... I felt targeted. I probably wasn’t but because she didn’t talk to me, I felt that way.

The neglect of this small group leader clearly had a profound impact on her years later.

SJM17’s comments on going to a program “with a leader who didn’t really want to be there” was telling. It is clear that for many of those I interviewed, the leader was not just seen as a program director who was there to run fun activities. Rather, there was a desire for a greater depth of relational commitment from this leader. PRAIRIEM12 discussed at length the importance of his youth leader telling me that

YOUTH LEADER was probably the real reason I went to youth group. He genuinely cared about us. We became friends with him. We liked him. What really drew us to him was that if he visited your cabin before bed he would go and pray with each individual camper. It was like having a big brother, youth group dad of collective youth group. When we heard he was running youth group in a town 25 minutes away we decided to go along.

It is also clear from the case study and the Briercrest interviews that the departure of a youth leader can have large consequences for a youth ministry program and the youth who attend. The firing of PRAIRIEF8 and PRAIRIE 12's youth leader had a distinct and negative impact on them. PRAIRIEF8 called their youth leader "our youth group dad" and was clearly upset when she related the story of his leaving the youth group. In her words,

I didn't have ill feelings (towards the church) until YOUTH LEADER was fired. The youth group fell apart and we lost our youth group dad. It was very sudden. One night he told us the church was letting him go and only had a couple of weeks left (I think the month of December) and had a big all-nighter on New Year's. Even the leaders only found out right before youth group. Church didn't feel he did a good job and wanted an associate pastor.

The departure of PRAIRIEM9's youth leader who went to plant a church also impacted him deeply. Similarly, my departure from St. John's impacted SJF11's two children and SJF18 spoke of her daughter being impacted by a high turnover of leaders. However, the difference between St. John's and the Briercrest students may have been that for St. John's, there was a structure in place that coped better with transition so that they did not lose their young people.

6.7 Transitions: The Impact of a Change in Program

I have outlined earlier the impact of the changes to the St. John's (Shaughnessy) youth ministry. There was an increase in overall numbers of those who attended and there was a marked increase in retention. In addition to this was an increase in commitment and depth of relationships within the group.

There were two Briercrest students (PRAIRIEF6 and PRAIRIEM13) who were involved in programs that changed from attractional to being more focused on spiritual disciplines and the formation of a Christian community. PRAIRIEF6 described the early program as being "fun with donuts but the youth were not all that invested in it." She enjoyed the program even though she found the group to be "clumpy" (cliquey). She loved the games and activities the youth group ran, especially sledding in the snow, and was not happy when the new youth leader changed the program "it wasn't fun anymore" was her opinion. The group also changed meeting times from Friday to Sunday night. "The Friday night time was to stop kids from partying but they partied anyway" was her recollection.

However, while she initially recoiled from the changes, she grew to love them. She spoke at length about the positive results

At first, the group dropped in numbers dropped initially—it wasn't as fun anymore. After it stopped being, fun numbers dropped but then numbers grew back. We had meals together and moved the day from Friday to Sunday ... combined junior and senior youth which opened up older teens like me to take a leader role. Some kids come simply for the meal but then stayed and their lives were changed ... it became a very accepting group. Before it was clumped together with barriers and there was a culture of gossiping when the group focused on games ... when we shared a meal together ...there was less gossiping. I remember thinking this change has really worked!

In her mind, the youth became like a youth church service, which, from my observation as interviewer, she thought was a positive thing. It also moved her to make friends within the group, something she had not done before the changes. “He actively made us mingle through playing a game or talking to each other. And, after a few weeks, this was nicer—to share about what is going on in our world with other age groups.” PRAIRIEM13's group had changed from a “super hype time” geared to numerical growth to one that “cared about me and my faith,” “developed community” and did a “fantastic job developing me as a leader”.

6.8 An Emphasis on Who We Are (Identity) and What We Do (Mission)

I have written earlier in this paper that there must be a connection between who we are (identity) and what we do (mission). In youth ministry, however, there is a common dichotomy of identity and mission that is seen in programming, with “discipleship” at one time and “fun” another. This dichotomy of preservation and propagation (Nel 2015:116) is evident in the case study of St. John's and in the youth ministry of many of the Briercrest students. For St. John's, prior to the change in program, Friday evening was designed to provide a “fun” social time for the youth of the church while, at least in the minds of some, was also for young people who did not belong to the church to join in. The Sunday morning program was intended to provide Bible study and Christian growth. There seemed to be little thought given to how the identity of this youth ministry needed to shape and direct how it reaches a young person who does not go to church. While there was a Bible study on each Sunday morning, the overall program was described as “haphazard” and had “little impact” and led by leaders who “seemed like they didn't want to be there.” None of the participants indicated that it was successful in being a vibrant Christian community that nurtured Christian growth. After the changes instituted in 2005, an emphasis was placed in the integration of our identity and our purpose. This led to what appears to be a substantial success in Christian maturity and retention. Not only do the numbers clearly indicate this, but the comments of many of those in the St. John's case study do as well.

For many, if not most of the Briercrest students, the role of spiritual disciplines seemed to be secondary or even tertiary in the programs they attended. PRAIRIEM12 noted how he was ill-equipped to pray, even though he was a regular participant in the youth group, and, valued youth

group highly. This seems to be reflected also in many of the young people from Briercrest. While there was a component of spiritual input, the majority did not appear to be able to describe how the program had impacted them spiritually in a positive way. However, there were four who were strongly impacted by their youth ministry (PRAIRIEM9, PRAIRIEM13, PRAIRIEF6, PRAIRIEM14). This is due to the aforementioned role of a leader who cared for them and was committed to them.

6.9 The Role of Christian Parents and, the Connection to the Larger Church Body

It was clear from my interviews with the Briercrest students that the role of parents played a major part in keeping youth involved in the church. This was stated four times in the Briercrest interviews. Similarly, the bulk of the youth who made the successful transition from the old program to the new one at St. John's came from committed church families. The previous model of youth ministry was unsuccessful in retaining these church youth. In addition, the old program did not prioritize building their own youth from within the church. The Friday program, while ineffective, had a number of resources directed towards it (a fulltime staff member and interns). However, the Sunday program had little committed leadership and, at one stage, a full-time youth director who, in the mind of one participant, rarely showed up. Whereas the new model not only invested in them and developed a Christian community where they would grow spiritually, it also became a place where they could also bring their nonchurched friends.

The data concerning the relationship between the youth and the church shows us two contrasts. The first contrast concerns the relationship between the St. John's youth and the wider church body before and after the changes that were implemented in 2005. Prior to 2005, there does not appear to be a strong connection between the St. John's youth and the greater church body. SJM13 stated that the church saw the young people as "accessories" with the church as making "little effort to integrate the youth into the church." In addition to this are the findings of the Pyramid Task Force in 2002 that show youth were disengaging from the church either during or after their youth group age. It is my belief that previous to the change in 2005, the youth, while in some way committed to being Christian and a part of St. John's, did not see this commitment as deep or one that would have ramifications on their schedule and life in the future. While it may have not been a conscious decision, there was a clear pattern of older youth dropping out of the church and this could have had a large impact. In other words, dropping out of church was simply the norm.

There is a distinct change in this following the change in program, as many of the St. John's participants indicated a strong connection with the church. SJM9 discussed how the youth were "needed and wanted" in the evening service. In addition, many of those that I interviewed talked about church in positive terms and how committed they were to it. SJM22 related the amusing story of one

young adult who, while going through contractions and would give birth the following day, wanted to stay in church because she enjoyed it and was committed to it.

The second contrast is between the St. John's people and the Briercrest students. The St. John's youth became committed members of a congregation, whereas there is little data from the Briercrest students to indicate a strong connection to the church. While there is a small amount of positive reflection on the church (PRAIRIEM9) there was also a number of negative comments on the larger church body. PRAIRIEM14 believed that "the church liked the idea of a youth group and a youth pastor but didn't really like the idea of funding a youth group and a youth pastor." This meant that the youth group had to do a lot of fundraising. PRAIRIEF8 had a similar view to PRAIRIEM14 in that she expressed the opinion that "The Church and youth group were in the same building but not connected, church didn't seem interested in us." PRAIRIEF2 expressed a similar view stating, "The youth group was super disconnected from the church." PRAIRIEM9's experience was a rarity in the Briercrest interviews telling me that "the church as a whole cared for the youth and the youth group. We felt like we were part of the church and valued." In his words, the church showed them "we weren't just a bunch of teenagers."

6.10 Contentment

It is clear from the data that not everyone was content with the programs that were offered. A number of Briercrest students reacted against their youth program for a variety of reasons. They may not have liked the games, they may have felt bullied, they may not have enjoyed the content, or they may simply have not fitted in. Similarly, there was discontent with many aspects of the St. John's program. It is significant that the parents in the St. John's case study were concerned about those young people who either preferred the old program or did not make the transition to the new program. SJM19 wondered "Was there the possibility of a softer approach, some way to say 'we're not leaving anyone behind?'" He posed the question of whether there could have been a second model that "scoops up the not so keen?" His concern was whether or not a young person who was not involved in the youth ministry would "look back warmly and feel they could come back into the church. Sometimes seeds take some time to grow." SJF23 added, "While we aren't going to keep everyone, how they leave is important and can they come back?" It should be noted that this, however, was not a concern raised among the youth who participated in the youth group who were interviewed.

Stated simply, it appears as if one program cannot please everyone. Therefore, pleasing people may, in the end, be the wrong criterion for the formation of a youth ministry program.

7. Conclusion

The case study indicates a number of outcomes that were achieved and, in the minds of the interview participants, there were clear reasons as to what lead to these outcomes. It is clear that numerically the pyramidal structure of the youth program was reversed. Immediately prior to the changes in the program the youth group tallied approximately 20 to 30 young people. At the end of 2009, there were one hundred and 35. Not only were numbers reversed, but there appears to be a reversal in the commitment and attendance of the young people associated with the program. This commitment led to friendship and long-lasting relationships and to a greater overall commitment to the church. The emphasis moved away from a drop-in style of program and its apparent associated lack of commitment to one that, in the minds of the interview participants, became a strong community. In addition, numerical growth occurred through something other than culturally-based entertainment.

SJM21 became a Christian through the ministry of the young adults' group. He happened to see an old high school friend who was attending the group and they reconnected over and discussed Christianity. Over the course of several months, SJM21 met with various members of the group, myself included, and ended up going to church and then the young adults' group. In our Skype interview, he was candid about the role the youth ministry made in his life. His words make a fitting end to this section

A silly thing comes to mind, girls wanted to talk to me, I wasn't used to that. They were interested, asked questions, wanted to get to know me. There wasn't a lot of the small talk and interpersonal nonsense that I was used to at university—these people were interested in me right away. The proof is in the pudding. When I was there, there were 20 in the group. It was good-sized and grew larger. I'm still in touch with them and, for the most, part they are dedicated Christians, not just regular attenders but deeply involved in church. I can think of a dozen straight away who still love Jesus.

There was a sense that, within the whole community, that we were engaged in a serious task, life or death—the program reflected that. It was a loving place, not a surface level place, they wanted me to know that and know the love of God, we got to the heart of the matter, everything had a purpose, the activities brought us closer together as a community around the cross—we all knew that and embraced it. We wanted to talk about spiritual things

We were very young, it is 10 years later, life throws a lot of garbage at you, in many cases people aren't prepared, (I've got depression) it's hard to be a Christian, to function at all, with things like doubt. I've been able to look back on that time and my conversion, it is all part and parcel of what I can look back on to when I was saved, if there is staying power to it, it is because it is one of the few times in my life that I was part of something where I was loved beyond what I could imagine.

CHAPTER 5 TOWARDS A NEW PRAXIS

1. Introduction

The crisis facing modern youth ministry is our loss of retention of our young people. In short, the church is failing to hold on to those young people who either have Christian parents or joined a youth ministry program sometime in their youth. This continued loss of young people has led to Canada's *Hemorrhaging Faith* research document and the St. John's (Shaughnessy) Report of the Pyramid Task Force.

Osmer encourages the last task of Practical Theology as the task of designing action strategies that will influence situations in positive ways (Osmer 2008:4). The Report of the Pyramid Task Force from St. John's (Shaughnessy) in 2002 highlighted the need for a radical revisioning of the youth ministry practices in that church. Responding to the "results" stemming from their practice, they responded with the call for a new theory that would hopefully shape a new practice bringing new results. Dean tells us that "Practical theology begins and ends in practice, so if you want to discover the theological assumptions you hold dear, start by examining the way you practice your faith" (Dean 2001:37). As I sought to examine our faith practices in youth ministry, I am aware of Root's exhortation to reflect on "the layered meaning of a performance in a context" (Root 2007:58). Like all crises, the crisis facing youth ministry in North America did not appear out of a vacuum, it is seated in a theological context and history.

2. The Shaping of Our Practice Stems from Our History

Many practitioners of youth ministry in Canada and the U.S.A. have a number of deeply held theological assumptions that have directed the way we perform youth ministry. These assumptions have not come about by chance, they are a direct result of our history. However, they must be reflected on critically, especially in light of the crisis facing the church in North America.

In the late 1930s, North American youth ministry underwent a primary shift in its focus away from youth in the church to those outside of the church. We see this in the ministry of Jim Rayburn (Young Life), the formation of Youth for Christ, and the impact of Youth Specialties, an organization that has set the tone for much of what takes place in North American youth ministry today. It is not difficult to see how our history led to the articulation of the use of entertainment into a formulated strategy like Duffy Robbin's Funnel, especially in the first level of his funnel;

the Come Level. However, the questions must be asked, “Is this use of entertainment effective? And “Is it effective in Canada today?” As the modern church “peels back the layers” of our performance with youth, we must reflect and rethink our attachment to our past and the movements that have continued to shape modern practice. Much earlier in this paper I noted Senter’s challenge for a “revolution” in the way we understand youth ministry and now, in light of my research, I believe that his call is an imperative that we must heed; it is my belief that we must totally restructure the way we think about youth ministry.

3. The Funnel, Or At Least Part of the Funnel

From my research, it is clear that while the Funnel Model of youth ministry had impacted all of the churches represented, they were not running all five levels that Robbins’ promotes. This may be due to a number of factors, including a lack of people to run it or an incomplete understanding of the various steps in this model. It could be that, for most churches, there was simply “not enough hands on deck” to run such a complex system. Further research is necessary to ascertain the exact reasons why all levels of the Funnel were not in operation. What is clear, however, is the Vancouver youth ministry and many of the youth ministries represented by the Briercrest students showed a partial use of the Funnel through a two-part model with one meeting dedicated to evangelism and one meeting dedicated to Christian nurture. In addition, was the impact of attractional youth ministry where games and a “fun” time was central and believed to be potentially effective in bringing outsiders to the youth program. It must be noted that St. John’s (Shaughnessy) is a large church with hundreds of parishioners, if any church had the ability to run the Funnel, it should have been this one. It is my belief that St. John’s was operating on “assumptions” of what is effective youth ministry rather than a full understanding of the Funnel and its various levels.

There also appeared to be uncertainty as to the ultimate goal of many of the programs. Was this program designed to accomplish evangelism or Christian nurture or both? At this stage, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the Funnel Model on Canada and North American youth ministry. One conclusion that can be drawn is that, from my research, the majority of the youth ministries examined relied heavily on attractional program (which is the key idea to the Come Level) and/or games (or, in the case of St. John’s, sports and movies). We can also conclude that these youth ministries proved to be generally ineffectual in the area of youth retention. In addition to this is the fact that, in St. John’s (Shaughnessy), and all

but two of the churches represented by the Briercrest students, the dichotomy of evangelism and discipleship was not effective.

4. Does the Funnel Provide Revelation or Hiddenness? Does it Attract or Repel?

The goal of the Funnel is for “attraction and revelation” built on activities and then some sort of gospel message or Bible study. However, while I have stated that the youth ministries surveyed did not run an exact representation of the Funnel, I am left to question the effectiveness of the results of this methodology whether run in full or in part. In the case of St. John’s (Shaughnessy), there was no numerical growth, no evangelistic impact and, a loss of the majority of those in the youth ministry; even those from church-going families. Similarly, the Briercrest students gave little reason to believe that their youth ministries, save two, were ultimately successful. Does the Funnel (and attractional youth ministry), hide the Christian message instead of revealing it? There is nothing in the thirty-eight interviews that I carried out that showed the “attractive” (and games based) program was actually attractive long-term.

In addition, the very nature of the Come Level of the Funnel does not encourage or develop a commitment to the program. It is, by nature, a drop-in program designed to either attract or, if you are not interested in the activity offered, repel. As I reflect on the St. John’s (Shaughnessy) interviews, I am impacted by the repeated reflection of commitment which was clearly was an important step for those in the youth ministry. Those who committed themselves to the program reported that they experienced a community that was not present in the previous program built on a drop-in style of program.

I believe that my research has raised another question, “Does the Funnel Model of youth ministry work against producing those elements of youth ministry that will produce true, long-term results?” In other words, “Does the Funnel, by its very nature, help to produce the crisis in retention?” To state it another way, “Does it fail to attract the nonchurch person and does it fail and to keep and to build the Christian thus promoting a weakening of the church?” In the case of St. John’s, the youth program failed not only to attract, but it failed to produce young people strong in the faith who stayed in the church. For both St. John’s and the youth from the prairies, a number of those interviewed indicated that the youth ministry did little to promote Christian maturity (their belief was that having Christian parents was a more important factor in the spiritual development of the young person).

It is now necessary to form some conclusions from my research in light of how they can help the church, and how the church in North America should respond to the retention crisis.

5. Identity and Mission

The key area that has concerned this paper is how youth ministry engages missionally with those outside of the church. It is clear from our history that youth ministry has, since the late 1930s, been interested in reaching those who are not church attenders. However, our missional focus must come from and be deeply connected to. our identity as God's people. We are indeed "God's search parties" (Nel 2015:38) and this springs from living out our identity as God's kingdom. This ought to be seen in activities that spring from this identity, spiritual practices such as prayer, Bible study and, evangelism *rather* than those activities deemed culturally attractive. From the evidence of St. John's (Shaughnessy) and the majority of the churches represented by the Briercrest students, we are not simply skilled enough to compete with the world in order to attract with a program that mimics the world nor are we effective at it.

Nel (Nel 2017:4) is correct when he calls us to see that our identity must determine our purpose. This appears to have been either unknown or neglected by St. John's prior to 2005 as there were at least two different groups with distinct identities and purposes (the "social/evangelistic" Friday evening and the Sunday morning "discipleship" group). It also appears to be either unknown or neglected by the youth ministries represented by the majority of the Briercrest students. It is my belief that those who shaped and designed the programs that I researched have primarily followed their history (Young Life, Youth for Christ, Youth Specialties) and therefore provided a youth ministry that focused on evangelism via culturally relevant and attractive means. Discipleship seems to have been either neglected or "there simply was not enough time nor people" to make it happen. There must be a new focus on how exactly our identity shapes our mission. In other words, how does *who we are* impact *what we do*. I believe that it is clear that the research from Vancouver and the prairies offers us a clear way forward. A youth ministry that seeks to "be" the Kingdom of God will be informed by the very practices that come from this Kingdom, rather than secular entertainment.

As I reflect on my research, there were a number of factors that, in the lives of those interviewed, provide a much better likelihood of success than games or entertainment. In addition, these

factors appear to be more successful than the hoped-for results coming from the division of evangelism and discipleship. These factors are: having a clearly articulated Christian identity, Christian parents who encourage church participation, caring leaders, a clear structure, strong relationships within the youth group, and commitment to the program. It must be emphasized that these factors are also central to our identity. The division of evangelism and discipleship, which I believe is also a division of what we do and who we are, is the antithesis of what we should be doing.

My research indicates that, while the Funnel Model may not have been totally represented in the youth ministries that I studied its impact was evident. Furthermore, the splitting of identity and mission is a direct result of the Funnel and one that the Funnel must produce due to the separate levels with each level being a different ministry with a different identity. This different ministry will almost certainly have a distinct purpose and character. It is necessary to note that the character of the Come Level will not be built on Christian disciplines as it is designed for nonChristians and will have programming that is, by its nature, unspiritual. Herein lies a fatal flaw; if Nel is correct and our identity must determine our purpose (and, I would add, our character), we must run a program with an identity that works with our mission. In other words, we must run a program that, while designed to reach the nonChristian, is built on activities, spiritual disciplines, and community development that “cuts with the grain” of our identity rather than against it.

As I reflect on all of the information that was presented in the interview process, there were numerous comments that struck me as a call for profound change. Consider PRAIRIEF7’s statement that, “I’d never go alone (to youth group), if you were alone it was obvious you were alone. Never go alone.” This seems to me to be antithetical to the very core of our identity where we must be eager to “love the stranger” (Deut 10:19). Note also PRAIRIEF3’s statement that, “Youth group wasn’t doing what it was supposed to do—a taste of what the church is really like.” PRAIRIEM12’s comments reflect the fact that, while he may have enjoyed the youth group, and respected the leader, by his own admission did not understand basic Christian practices such as prayer and the importance of the Bible. It is interesting to note SJM9’s reflection where he connects the lack of success with “not focusing on who they were.”

6. Moving Towards Change: Redefining Youth Ministry's Identity

With the above comments in mind, there are a number of areas the church will need to address. One issue is that of youth ministry identity. The church must ask, “What ought to be the identity of our youth ministry?” It is my belief that youth ministry in North American has an identity that has bound itself to a “vicious cycle” that produces a lack of retention. What I mean is that what is used to attract young people, namely entertainment and games, has produced a group with the identity of people who come for entertainment and games. This leads to a deficiency in the spiritual development of its members and a paucity of those factors that promote longevity in the Christian life—factors such as prayer and Bible reading. This will then lead back to a lack of retention in the program.

7. Moving Towards Change: The Connection Between the Church and the Youth Group

Another issue that the church should reflect on is the youth (and youth group's) relationship with the larger church body. How does the church connect its young people into the life of the congregation? This is an important question. How does the church be “youth friendly” without compromising core values or adopting gimmickry? It is important to note that not one of those interviewed gave any indication of wanting to be disconnected from the adult members of the congregation nor did they express any dislike of the church. However, there was the sentiment that they felt like a detached part of the church with many of the youth echoing Stuart Cummings-Bond's idea of the One-eared Mickey Mouse. Nor did they give the indication of being prepared for fully fledged participation into church life. It is my belief that the research shows that an attractional group, or one committed to the splitting of evangelism and discipleship, promotes this One-eared model of youth ministry.

I am reminded of the opinion of the chair of the Pyramid Task Force, young people were seen as “accessories” rather than integral members of the church, not to mention the very future of this church. One issue for the church in North America to consider is to move away from any program that constructs a youth ministry as a detached “ear” that has little to no involvement with the life of the other congregants but rather, to see it more as the “youth arm” of the church. It is interesting to note that the Pyramid Task Force report called for youth to have “an active engagement in the life of the church” with the challenge to see youth “not as an add-on but rather as an intrinsic part of church programming and vision” (Bentley et al 2002).

For this to happen the youth group must focus on those features that the church is committed to, features such as effective Christian living, spiritual maturity, and spiritual disciplines. If these are manifested in a way that is “youth friendly” they may also be evangelistically effective as they clearly were in the case of the Vancouver church. This core of young people saw the church as important and therefore committed themselves to each other which then led to numerical growth. A focus on Christian practices will also make the transition from youth group to church an easier one as they will be characterized by the same practices.

In light of my research, the church should reflect on how to incorporate more effectively young people into corporate church life as this is a needed step towards healthy retention.

8. Moving Towards Change: The Necessity of Caring Leaders, the Necessity to Care for the Leaders

The research highlights the fact that the ministry of the youth leader was very important for a large number of youth; both in Vancouver and the prairies. The care or lack of care from a leader was a theme that featured prominently in many, if not most of my interviews. It was clear that the Briercrest students still felt the impact of a leader, both positively and negatively, is still felt years later. As the care of a leader is so important, the church must ensure training and support in order to maximize their ability to minister. These leaders must have their “heart in it” and care about those in the ministry.

Furthermore, the splitting of evangelism and discipleship can be a program that requires a specific skill set, a large amount of time and may preclude a part-time or volunteer leader from undertaking it.

In addition, is the issue of transitions in youth leadership. The church needs to take care in the hiring and firing process in order to not damage this significant relationship between youth and leader. Similarly, the church must advocate for youth leaders who can “stick around” for a number of years to help young people through the tumultuous time of youth.

In light of my research, the church should seek to promote wise, stable, skilled, and caring leadership designed for long-term youth ministry. It should also reflect deeply on how to support these youth leaders emotionally, spiritually, and practically.

9. Moving Towards Change: Do Not Reach Around the Christian Young Person

As stated earlier, the first level of the Funnel is dedicated to the pursuit of those outside of the church. I believe that my research shows that a direct result of this is the neglect of the spiritual development of the young person who is already in the church. There is, in essence, a “reaching around” of this young person in order to attract a young person outside of the church, often at the expense of those whom we have already “have.” In the end, we do not attract, and we do not keep.

In light of my research, the church must seek first to equip, bless and encourage those young people who already attend, rather than “neglect” them in the pursuit of those outside of the church.

10. Moving Towards Change: The Need for, and the Interconnectedness of Commitment and Community

The case study of St. John’s (Shaughnessy) indicated a direct connection between the formation of an intimate community and a commitment to that community. SJF12’s comments are particularly interesting here, “We actually started talking and getting to know each other rather than being consumers at the entertainment complex.” While I believe that it is necessary for more research on this interconnection, I have a number of questions on this issue: Does a youth ministry that is attractional, inhibit the development of community due to its inherent drop-in program? And, In lieu of a very “busy” modern society, is there now a new entry-level, that is, the need for a commitment mindset? In other words, does the person outside of the church need to be convinced of the benefits of “putting aside other things” (such as sports) in order to explore the youth ministry program instead? If so, the splitting of evangelism and discipleship will prove to be unhelpful.

In light of my research, the church must rethink the inherent lack of commitment that accompanies attractional youth ministry as this works *against* the development of community. The church must focus instead on a commitment mindset that will *aid* in the development of community.

11. Penultimate Thoughts: Contentment and Success

My research shows that total contentment with the youth ministry program is an elusive goal. This appears to be true in Vancouver and, for the most part, with the Briercrest students. If it is impossible to please everyone, we must set into place a program that reflects our identity and connects this with the outworking of our mission. Additionally, it is my submission that a program that achieves retention must be strongly preferable to one that does not. The Funnel, whether run with all its levels or merely with one or two, according to in my research, is not helping to reverse the crisis in retention among the church in Canada. Instead of attractional program, Christian youth ministry must be built on an identity that is demonstrably Christian, with strong, intimate care from leaders. It must be a loving community that is deeply connected with the larger church body both. Finally, it will be committed to the pursuit of Christian disciplines such as prayer and Bible study. This program should, if the witness of St. John's (Shaughnessy) and of the Briercrest students is correct, help to reverse the crisis.

12. Areas for Future Research

There are a number of areas where research would be helpful in light of my research. Among these are:

- A further examination of evangelism and identity would be helpful. The rise of groups like Young Life and Youth for Christ did not come out of a vacuum. They were formed due to the perception that the church was not doing enough to reach those outside of the church. How can a church-based youth ministry, committed to a "Christian identity," maintain a healthy and effective focus on evangelism?
- An examination of all five levels of the Funnel would be helpful. The churches in my research were not running them, why not?
- Finally, study on the connection between commitment and community is a necessary issue raised in response to many of the comments from those who were involved at St. John's (Shaughnessy).

ANNEXURE I: CONSENT FORM

Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria
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Agreement to Participate in Research for a case study for Phd in Practical Theology (Youth Ministry)

Name: _____

You have been asked to participate in a research study investigating the connection between the methods used to attract youth to your church and the general trend of churches in Canada to lose youth.

You will be asked to discuss your involvement in your church and youth group. This will involve the completion of a confidential questionnaire with the possibility of one-to-one follow up interview at a time convenient to you.

You have the right to not answer questions you do not wish to answer. You may refuse to participate in the entire study or in any part of the study. If you decide to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw at any time. There will be no disadvantage to you in any way if you choose not to participate in the study.

The results of this research will benefit the church in North America, specifically Canada. The hope will be to provide some clarity in the connection between what is used to attract youth and the ability to keep them in the church.

Although the results of this study may be published, no information that could identify you will be included. Identifying information will be excluded or given a new identity. Should you withdraw from the study the data provided by you would not be included.

Questions about this research may be addressed to Kenneth Moser, Assistant Professor, Briercrest College and Seminary. Email: kmoser@briercrest.ca. Phone 306 630 2357

Complaints about the research may be presented to Malan Nel, Faculty of Theology, Center for Contextual Ministry, University of Pretoria. Email: malannelup@gmail.com. Phone +27 12 420 2348

Your consent is being given voluntarily. At the time that you sign this consent form, you will receive a copy of it for your records, signed and dated by the researcher.

☐ ☐ **The signature of a subject on this document indicates agreement to participate in the study.**

☐ **The signature of a researcher on this document indicates agreement to include the above named subject in the research and attestation that the subject has been fully informed of his or her rights.**

_____ Participant's Signature, Date _____

_____ Researcher's Signature, Date _____

ANNEXURE II: Report of the Pyramid Task Force
Report of the Pyramid Task Force October 2002
Report of the Pyramid Task Force

October 2002

Respectfully submitted to the Church Committee
St. John's (Shaughnessy)

by
Lesley Bentley
Edward Bowes
Alan Hobkirk
Ryan Klassen
David Ley (Chair)
Holly McMillan
Evelyn Stevenson
Richard Thompson
Irena Tippet
Catherine Warren

'...your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost' (Matthew 18: 14)

'If children are such an essential visual aid, why are so many churches indifferent to their children and those who work with them?' [Scripture Union commentary on Matthew 18: 1-14]

Pyramid Task Force
Report

The Issue

At St. John's there is a steady loss of children from church life through the mid-late teenage years. The church has a very broad base of children in Sunday School, but with increasing age there is a steady decline in attendance, tapering to very few regular attendants in grades 11 and 12 and continuing on into the early twenties – *ie*, a pyramidal structure. In this report we examine explanations for this decline in attendance, and offer some recommendations for action.

The Mandate

Following a concern raised at Vestry in February 2002, Church Committee struck an advisory task force at the end of March with the following mandate:

- i. To gather information about the actual shape of youth ministry and to confirm the existence of a significant falling off of participation among older teens.
- ii. To analyse the reasons for such a pyramidal structure through interviews with youth, parents and leaders of other churches.
- iii. To develop creative solutions faithful to the St. John's vision statement and the New Testament gospel.
- iv. To develop specific recommendations with actions and time-lines.
- v. To report to Church Committee.

The Method

The task force met five times between May and October 2002. Evidence was collected from interviews and focus groups conducted by committee members with past and present youth at St. John's, with parents of teens, and with leaders of youth ministries at four other churches – in total more than 40 people. Some of us have extended the search to more informal discussions with knowledgeable specialists (eg. speakers at Regent Summer School). Some of the task force also benefitted from reading David Overholt and James Penner's *Soul Searching the Millennial Generation: Strategies for Youth Workers* (2002), a Canadian primer on youth ministry based upon practical experience plus Reginald Bibby's surveys of the values and behaviours of Canadian youth.

The Analysis

The nature of the mandate, to examine an apparent 'problem area' inevitably will lead to some critical remarks. These remarks do not mean that the speakers did not find points of value in their church experience – almost all of them did. Nor does it mean of course that any member of the task force would subscribe to a primarily critical assessment of the record of engagement with youth at St. John's. How could we in light of conversions, in light of effective teaching and character formation, in light of involvement in ministry by youth including such roles as Sunday School workers and summer Bible School contributors at St. John's and in distant mission fields? Much that is good is clearly happening. But this task force was set up to examine an imputed problem, and its language will of course reflect that charge. Nor is any critical commentary intended to be directed at staff or other leaders, especially leaders of the youth program, for whom positive assessments were often made in interviews and focus groups. The issues are systemic and should not be reduced to personal criticism.

Inevitably the diversity of youth personalities precludes any master theme that impacts everyone equally. Nonetheless some patterns emerged in the evidence we collected. Our evidence is organised around six themes; themes 2-6 were topics presented to each of the interviewees and focus groups.

1. The attendance pyramid.

The drop-off of attendance through the teenage years exists at St. John's and at other churches in the region. Here is the record of several West Side evangelical churches for 'typical Sunday attendance':

- Church *a* -- grades 5-7, 20 kids, grades 11-12, 5 kids
- Church *b* – grades 5-6, 50 kids, gr. 11-12, 25
- Church *c* – Sunday School total, 80 kids, gr. 10-12, 12

St. John's – Gr. 6-7, 25 kids, gr. 11-12, 12

In each case there is a significant reduction in numbers towards grades 11 and 12 in each of these evangelical churches, representing three denominations. Grade 11-12 attendance is typically half or less the level of grades 6-7.

Some kids substitute a para-church group for church participation, such as Young Life or Songs in the Night. Others remain in church on a Sunday morning and may not be noticed by youth leaders leading Sunday youth classes. Nonetheless the evidence we reviewed still suggests a significant number have become non-participants at St. John's by their mid-late teens.

2. Why do young people attend church?

2.1 Children's encounter with church is usually – but not always – established in a family context. They attend as youngsters as part of a shared family event over which they have no choice. Usually this is a happy time—that would certainly be suggested by children's outward expressions at Sunday School. By their early teens they are developing their own views on 'the church experience', but it is only in their mid to late teens that they have the practical agency to put their preferences into action.

2.2 Peers play a dominant place in the life of most teens, to such an extent that Overholt and Penner describe these networks as 'tribal'. Relational friendships are essential. When peers drop away from church there is a sharp drop in motivation for other teens to continue in attendance. At the same time the maintenance of a peer group is likely to sustain attendance. Positive social relations with, and spiritual modelling by, church youth leaders are also important factor influencing teen commitment to a congregation.

Teens attend church to be with other young people with the same beliefs (16-year old).

2.3 For a number, faith is certainly a reason that encourages participation; that faith (or even interest) may have been cultivated by a Christian camp experience, or may have been nurtured through Sunday School and a family environment where spirituality is a priority.

2.4 It is the view of youth leaders that personal identification with a congregation, notably through service, is indispensable to ongoing attendance.

Ownership of ministry is critical, being part of the fabric of the church. We have to nurture inclusion, integration at an earlier age (youth leader).

3. How well do young people understand the Christian story of salvation, restoration, and a servant lifestyle?

There were differences of opinion in answering this question, matching no doubt the diversity that exists among young people.

3.1 Youth leaders and adults were on the whole not convinced that a mature Christian faith was often achieved during teenage years.

There's fairly limited knowledge. They know Bible stories and morality. But the grand narrative? They come to learn stuff, to gather information. But the big picture? (youth leader).

Our church was strictly entertaining kids for years. Ministry perhaps happened by age 17. Now discipleship is taken very seriously for ages 18-25 (youth leader).

3.2 Parental modelling and the lessons of camp were also seen as important sources of conveying 'the big picture'.

3.3 A minority of teenagers and adults saw a deeper understanding as possible and existing among some teens – indeed necessary for their continuing association with Christianity.

We have good leaders who go through the whole gospel thoroughly at St. John's (14-year old).

You have to have a religious commitment by grades 11-12 or you will stop going. Many will never come back. They have given church a try and it has not done anything for them—that's how they think (19-year old).

3.4 Practical teaching is preferred by youth, for example scenario role-playing or visits to settings of public discipleship like Mission Possible. Their understanding of the gospel includes a prominent place for integrity and justice.

3.5 Like adults, there is also a difference between knowledge and action.

Youth believe the Christian story, but are too scared to do anything about it (mid-teen).

4. Why do young people stop attending church?

There are a small number of factors that were repeated by both adults and teens.

4.1 The growing independence of mid-late teens was frequently mentioned, with an explosion of opportunities for leisure time, and no longer enough leisure time to follow through on all of them. Teens make selections.

Church is not the primary community compared to a sports team, let alone school activities.

Older kids have less free time. They need sleep if they are up late. Church becomes not relevant to their world. They are already bored at ages 11-13 but they can't be independent until ages 16-17 (youth leader).

4.2 Friendships and other relational issues remain foundational. At an earlier age they were a source of bonding around a Sunday School programme. But by the mid-teens and later they can be a factor that dissolves church connections.

There are cliques. It's hard to break in if you are not accepted (14-year old).

My grade 11-12 teacher was really dry. The group was very small so it was very uncomfortable, especially when questions were asked and you were supposed to have knowledge. There were not enough people, it was very awkward, there were long silences. So I stopped going (20-year old).

Several adults noted in addition the behaviour of kids at church youth groups is not always attractive, in terms of morality, including attitudes to drugs, and unkind behaviour, such as teasing.

4.3 Another repetitive theme is the regularity and predictability of church programmes and liturgy. In a society geared to novelty and impatient with tradition, such predictability is perceived to be boring, a searing indictment in current culture. This view, however, was not shared by all. A core group is committed to youth activities at St. John's. Some kids do not find the liturgy a problem; a number enjoy it.

4.4 Practical issues intervene, including the hassle of long-range commuting to church, the added pressure of homework and extra-curricular school activity, and life changes like departure for university.

4.5 Do we do enough to incorporate kids into the church? It is important that teens have opportunity to practice their faith – the recent addition of teenagers to the Sunday School teaching staff is an example of exactly the right development. An adult noted that dismissing children and youth from church after a few minutes in a morning service defines it as a place that is for adults only, and frequently older adults at that. Another adult noted:

We try to keep the children quiet, busy and out of the way [ie. out of the service] until they are old enough to sit still and not disrupt things. Then we wonder why when they are old enough to stay home they choose to do so!

While some adults see no problem with age-segregated activities, this view leaves unanswered the question of transition of youth into adult activities and worship.

4.6 Parental involvement may weaken as children become older and other family choices become available – eg holidays, cottage weekends.

4.7 Parent-child tensions may become expressed in teenage rejection of church as an institution dear to parents.

5. What particular barriers to youth participation exist at St. John's?

Responses to this question were directed primarily but not exclusively to the morning service. Answers were bi-polar. A significant number of teens (and parents of teens) saw limited barriers in present practices and were for the most part satisfied with the *status quo*. Others, however, both teens and adults, were critical.

5.1 A repetitive theme amongst those who were uncomfortable was a difficulty in engaging the style of worship. A liturgy based on 17C English is a significant barrier for a number of teens; it simply does not appear relevant to everyday life, and pales further with weekly repetition.

The services are not contemporary enough. Everything seems so old-fashioned in my opinion. The prayer book regurgitates. The same every week. Out-dated language. It's an exercise to sit through, boring me to death (19-year old).

5.2 There were many comments that sermons were too long, and difficult for teenage comprehension.

5.3 Traditional music and hymns are another problem for some. Overholt and Penner (2002) emphasise the centrality of contemporary music in teenage life. Kids frequently have a critical view of church music.

Why is the only musical style classical when the truth is that people of all ages enjoy contemporary music? (mid-teen)

Church music is not appealing to kids. It's skipped our generation. It needs to be more upbeat like at camps. Some hymns of course are classics. I know some adults who have left ... for more exciting music (mid-teen).

But other teens were equally critical of repetitive modern Christian songs and choruses that have limited depth to them. Some were uneasy that wholesale revision would alienate an adult congregation without necessarily firming up teenage involvement. There was recognition that St. John's has a reputation for traditional music performed to a high level that is an important part of the church's identity.

Don't change everything at St. John's or everyone will leave! St. John's is very good at what it does. But it is not contemporary (16-year old).

5.4 Together these problems combine to shape a negative perception of current morning worship for some, but not all, youth. For those who were critical, the most common descriptor is 'boring'. *There is a massive culture gap between the 17C culture of the morning service and the culture of teens (parent of teens).*

Kids don't want services so impersonal, formal and routine. Old-fashioned language is a problem. The sermons don't apply to kids. The services give the impression of an old person's religion. Our service reflects that stereotype and I wouldn't invite a friend (mid-teen).

5.5. Some adults and teens see the lack of service opportunities for young adults – eg as ushers, as readers, as musicians – in the morning service as a barrier to their commitment.

5.6 Young people do not feel fully-included in the selection of youth activities. Some youth events are considered 'lame'.

5.7 Friendships, new and old, become difficult with the small number of young people compared with the large size of St. John's. Activities are needed to encourage friendships across homogenous age groups.

5.8 In the experience of any one teen some combination of these factors emerges. The greater the frustrations, the more likely is withdrawal. Other teens sense few of these frustrations.

6. How could St. John's be more successful in its ministry to young people?

It is important to remember that in the field of children's and youth ministry "*the church does so many things right*" (adult). There is widespread respect for, and friendship with, the ministry leaders. They are gifted and dedicated. The outreach basis for many of the Youth Group activities works well. The program is usually 'fun'.

Nonetheless the existence of the attendance pyramid suggests some changes are needed to address the drop-off of mid-late teens. A number of suggestions were offered.

6.1 There were several focus groups where the idea was raised of a contemporary service, comprising modern Christian music, testimonies, prayer, a short and practical address, and subsequent discussion. The North Shore ASAP is a particularly successful example. In some ways this is the origin of St. John's evening service, but there is a perception that the evening service is now owned by a congregation in their late 20s to mid 40s. St. John's youth feel no affiliation to it. But there was little reaction to the 2001-2002 monthly youth service, 'Celebration' at St. John's on Sunday mornings.

6.2 The second most common response was the advantage of continuing to join with other churches in the region for regular events to mitigate small numbers in most church youth groups. 'Cross-roads' was held up as a significant success.

6.3 There was support among parents and youth for 'faith in life' discussions. These should continue to cover practical areas of everyday life.

6.4 The issue of mentoring was raised, where adults and one or a small group of youth could explore the extension of faith into daily life, for example in a professional or occupational field.

6.5 The continuing value of one-on-one conversations between youth leaders and teens was emphasised, not least with those whose attendance is falling away. We are aware that current youth leaders are already active in such coffee shop meetings away from church.

6.6 A periodic 'mission' to youth was suggested, with a specific gospel call and invitation to discipleship. This would be accompanied by a follow-up program.

6.7 A number of suggestions called for more participation/integration of youth into the life of the church. They should be more fully involved in planning youth group activities. They should be better integrated into the Sunday morning services, by using their talents and offering opportunities for service: eg helping as ushers, in running the sound system, as musicians. Mentoring in these and other areas of service should be a priority.

Recommendations

Statement of Principle: We commend whole-hearted support for, and interest in, youth as persons loved by Christ living in an intrusive and disorienting culture. Youth are not an add-on, but intrinsic to programming and visioning in St. John's. Youth are not just the future of the church; they are its present in their vitality and honesty. They want to see the church make a difference in the world. They want a faith that is practical and expressed through the gospel in action, whether in summer mission or in outreach events like Mission Possible. Such activism can encourage and challenge the adult church to greater practice of their faith in the public realm.

- 1.1. There needs to be fuller integration of teens into the whole life of the church. A youth-friendly church intentionally creates a sense of belonging, ownership and participation. Make use of youth talents and create service opportunities for them. Seek out youth insights and act on them.
- 1.2. Be more creative in activities that move across age groups, lessening isolation of youth and easing their eventual integration as young adults. Possible candidates would include sports events and a tutorial service for provincial exams. We endorse practical discussion of faith and life issues with adults as these affect work and public witness. We request that Church Committee make a commitment to establish mentoring opportunities wherever possible.
- 1.3. It is important to maintain youth events as community builders and points of entry for new kids. These can run the gamut from fun activities to tutoring for provincial exams. Emphasise participatory discussion with teens, particularly on issues of faith and public culture. Encourage outreach and a servant lifestyle, eg summer missions. Continue regular retreats with other churches. Ensure youth fully are involved in deciding on programming.
- 1.4. Consider an eventual contemporary youth service. Begin with a monthly ASAP-type event with other west-side churches. This would address 6.1 and 6.2 above, the items that were raised most often in the responses.
- 1.5. At the same time there is need for a 'transitioning' into 'adult' church as teens 'graduate'.
 - E.1** Consider specific church programming and pastoral care for 17-23 year olds. At present there is no focussed ministry with this age group.
 - E.2** Can evening service be re-configured? Probably not, as it serves an existing and different constituency already. Youth recognise the desire of many adults to maintain the existing model of morning service – though clearly it does not serve well a number of teens. Church committee should consider modest adjustments to the morning service to make it more youth friendly. We suggest some slight variation in music without challenging the current structure. Use teen gifts as much as possible: readers, sidespersons, musicians. Re-examination of 17C English seems not to be feasible in light of strong support for it in the church.
 - E.3** Consider holding once a month a simplified and shorter family service at 9am and/or 11am.

Participation, ownership, and belonging should be key words as Church Committee considers the place of teens at St. John's.

GLOSSARY

ALL-IN: A St John's youth retreat that included all age groups in the youth ministry from junior high (CTC) to young adults (Ekklesia)

ALPHA: An evangelistic film series.

ANiC: Anglican Network in Canada is a group of Anglicans that split from the National Anglican Church of Canada.

AWANA: A parachurch organization devoted to evangelism and discipleship for children and youth.

BROHEEM: The name a St John's boys Bible Study ascribed to themselves indicating their brotherhood.

CENTRAL FOCUS: A Tuesday evening small group adult Bible study held at St. John's (Shaughnessy).

CHRISTIANITY EXPLORED: A course on the basics of the Christian Faith.

CORE: The leadership team for St John's Youth Ministry. This group was a Bible study group within the Ekklesia.

CTC: Christian Teens Club. The grade seven to nine youth group of at St. John's (Shaughnessy) formed in January, 2005 that met Sunday mornings at 11am.

EKKLESIA: The university aged youth group at St. John's (Shaughnessy).

POCO: Abbreviation for Port Coquitlam, B.C.

SENIOR YOUTH: The grade ten to twelve youth group at St. John's (Shaughnessy) formed in January, 2005 that met Sunday afternoons from 4:00-6:00 p.m.

UBC: University of British Columbia.

KICKSTART: The annual youth kickoff weekend that started the year at St. John's (Shaughnessy).

SPOTLIGHT: A "get to know you" segment in the youth group meeting where one person (or more) is brought up in front of the group and asked questions.

QUIZZING: An organized ministry promoting Bible memorization with quizzing tournaments.

OMNI: An annual weekend for youth ministry and evangelism that was held for a few years in Regina, Saskatchewan.

PIONEER PACIFIC: A national camping program with summer camps running in different locations across Canada.

REFINED AND UNDIGNIFIED: A Briercrest College hip hop dance team that ministers to local churches and Canadian youth.

THE BRIDGE: An alternative Anglican service held in Vancouver

YOUTHQUAKE: An annual Briercrest youth conference for young people and their leaders.

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