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A BEST-PRACTICE STUDY OF ASSETS CONTRIBUTING TO THE SPIRITUAL

GROWTH OF YOUTH IN FIVE SMALL PROTESTANT SUBURBAN CHURCHES

by

ALAN J. AVERA

A PROJECT/DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE

FACULTY OF COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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2005

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ABSTRACT

Small suburban churches have a vital role to play in reaching the diverse American population. Most Protestant churches in America are small. Yet the small suburban church tends to see itself at a disadvantage when it comes to youth ministry. Helping small suburban churches identify and make the most of their assets for youth ministry would benefit the majority of churches in America and would facilitate the spiritual growth of youth whose families are best reached by small churches.

The purpose of this study was to discover how five small Protestant suburban churches developed their assets to contribute to the spiritual growth of the youth in these churches and their communities. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What assets did the studied churches have that contributed to the spiritual growth of the youth in the church and in the community?

2. How did these churches identify and evaluate the potential contribution of these assets?

3. How did the leadership of these churches mobilize their congregations in order to implement these assets and enable the youth to grow spiritually?

The research was done as a qualitative case study employing multiple cases. Each case was a church chosen to represent best practice. These five churches had a recognized ability to help youth grow spiritually. Data were collected through

observation, document analysis, and interviews. Each case was analyzed individually, and then the cases were compared in cross-case analysis.

A chief finding of this study was that small suburban churches can excel in contributing to the spiritual growth of youth, both youth in the church and those who are outside the church in the community. This study found a significant number of assets that a small suburban church can potentially bring to the task. At least twenty different assets were present in the studied churches.

Two assets that appeared in all five of the studied churches were: a supportive congregation and a supportive pastor. While having a youth pastor was not an essential asset, what was essential was someone to advocate and cast vision for the youth ministry. Although not categorized as an asset among the twenty, another important characteristic of each of the studied churches was a willingness to change.

There was no observable overlap in the way these churches identified and evaluated the potential contribution of their assets. This indicates that there is not a specific formula that needs to be followed.

The study found many tools that church leaders could use in mobilizing the congregation to implement their assets and enable youth to grow spiritually. Sometimes the leadership must help the congregation recognize the results.

Hopefully this study will establish the small suburban church as a category for further study in youth ministry research. The church at large needs to better understand the challenges these churches face, along with the assets they bring. A ripe opportunity for further study is a longitudinal study, both of these churches and of the youth who have been impacted by these churches.

To my immediate family

Eileen,

Kimberly, Mark, and Bethany

You believed in me and in this project even when

I had trouble believing myself.

You saw me through to the end.

Also "to Him who is able to keep you from falling

and to present you before His glorious presence

without fault and with great joy–

to the only God our Savior

be glory, majesty, power and authority,

through Jesus Christ our Lord,

before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen." (Jude 24–25)

You kept me from falling.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Several people have helped me better understand youth ministry. First of all there was Bob Whittet, who was my colleague on the staff of the Church of the Atonement in Silver Spring, Maryland many years ago. He and his family have continued to be great friends to our family. Bob now teaches youth ministry at Gordon College. Bob, you have both taught and modeled what youth ministry is all about. Then there was Kristi Boss. Kristi invited my wife, Eileen, and I to partner with her in developing a middle school ministry for Youth for Christ in Olney, Maryland. Kristi, I would have never thought about researching youth ministry without having worked with you. Bill Riehl, a former director for Young Life in Montgomery County, Maryland, became one of the first elders in our church plant. And then finally there was Harry and Kaaren Rexroth of Youth for Christ of Montgomery County, Maryland. Harry, you frustrated me at times because we did not always see eye to eye about youth ministry, but we had the same heart for Christ and the same heart for kids. You were my biggest cheerleader, and I learned a lot from you. And Kaaren, I never doubted that you were praying for me.

One I cannot thank in person is the late Dr. James Montgomery Boice. He introduced me to the joy of ministry, and modeled what it means to love God with our whole being, including our minds. He has been my mentor from afar for over 20 years.

Finally, I thank the churches and the individuals who were the subjects of this study. Without you, it would have literally been impossible. I also thank those who recommended churches for this study.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This project has grown out of personal experiences and frustrations related to church planting in a suburban context. The primary outreach target of our church planting team was young families with children. We were able to attract and assimilate some of these families, yet we found that families who were happy with our church when their children were young often decided that they needed to leave when the children reached middle school age. Many of these families left our church plant for a particular large suburban church which had a large and active youth group. Personal conversations with a Presbyterian Church in America church planter in a neighboring suburb indicated that I was not the only one with this frustration. Even though this other church planter had a background in youth ministry prior to church planting, he found that it was very difficult to start a youth group at his church plant because families kept leaving for the large church with the large youth group at about the time the children reached middle school age.[1]

My frustration turned to hope after reading *Family-Based Youth Ministry: Reaching the Been-There, Done-That Generation* by Mark DeVries. Even though DeVries was the youth minister in a large church in Nashville, Tennessee, he prescribed an approach to youth ministry that seemed to draw on the strengths of a small suburban

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[1]Gary Yagel, series of interviews by author, and memories of advice pastor Yagel gave on church planting, 1988-1990.

church.[2] In the Foreword to the book, popular Presbyterian pastor and author Earl Palmer said that the big question is, "What is it that wins youth to faith and helps them to catch their stride as growing Christians?"[3] I thought about that question in my own ministry context, and I began to ponder whether there were some unique ways in which a small suburban church might be able to make that happen. Are there some unique assets that small suburban churches bring to the tasks of winning youth to faith and helping them to grow as Christians?

Statement of the Problem

In the abstract of his doctor of ministry dissertation, Stephen L. Van Horn described the difficult environment facing a small suburban church:

> Small churches are unable to offer the services, variety, and choices that the megachurches can. They cannot advertise to the extent that the larger churches can. They cannot meet the needs that megachurches can meet. They do not have the resources, the leaders, or the volunteer base. As a result, many small suburban churches are becoming feeder churches for the larger, program rich churches in their area as families leave the smaller churches looking for large youth groups for their teenagers or a big, exciting children's program for their elementary age children.[4]

This difficulty led Van Horn to ask his two research questions: "Is the small suburban church still viable?" and "If it is, what is its role?"[5] While the second question prejudges the answer to the first, both questions are important to answer. Van Horn concludes that a small church is still viable, so he spends most of his dissertation

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[2] Mark DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry: Reaching the Been-There, Done-That Generation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

[3] Earl Palmer, "Foreword" to DeVries *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 14.

[4] Stephen L. Van Horn, *Defining a Role for a Small Suburban Church in a Megachurch Environment* (Portland, OR: Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1996), xi.

[5] Ibid.

developing a philosophy of ministry and a strategy for a small suburban church.[6] In analyzing the challenges that a small church faces in a megachurch environment, Van Horn observes that for a small suburban church to try and minister like a large church is a recipe for frustration. "A small church cannot offer the variety and the choices that a larger church can and will only become frustrated trying."[7]

In reviewing some of the literature on small churches, Van Horn notes the importance of the small church's understanding of its own self-image: "Almost every writer says that when looking to the future the place to begin in a small church is with the church's image of itself."[8] After reviewing some of the unique characteristics of a small church, Van Horn concludes that a small church should not seek just to copy the things that make a larger church successful, but rather the small church needs to identify what its own assets and liabilities are, "and how it can take advantage of its assets to maximize its potential."[9]

With youth ministry in mind, this study takes Van Horn's inquiry even farther. For example, this study looks at whether small suburban churches offer any advantages which can be developed as assets specifically for youth ministry, and at what factors help a small suburban church recognize any advantages it may have for contributing to the spiritual growth of youth. While Van Horn compares the reality of small suburban church ministry with the principles written in church growth literature and so concludes

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[6] Ibid., 96-169.

[7] Ibid., 25.

[8] Ibid., 52.

[9] Ibid., 76.

that youth ministry is important,[10] this study is aimed at the problem of what advantages a small suburban church may have in the area of youth ministry. And while there are books on the subject of youth ministry in small churches, they do not focus on small suburban churches and the unique advantages that these small suburban churches may have.[11]

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study was to discover how five small protestant suburban churches developed their assets to contribute to the spiritual growth of the youth in these churches and their communities.

Primary Research Questions

To accomplish this purpose, I studied five selected small suburban churches as described in the methodology in chapter three. I used three primary research questions:

1) What assets did the studied churches have that contributed to the spiritual growth of the youth in the church and in the community?

2) How did these churches identify and evaluate the potential contribution of these assets?

3) How did the leaders of these churches mobilize their congregations in order to implement these assets and enable the youth to grow spiritually?

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[10] Ibid., 25-28.

[11] For example, see Rick Chromey, *Youth Ministry in Small Churches: Creative How-tos, Plus 28 Involving Activities* (Loveland, CO: Group Books, 1990) and Rich Grassel, *Help! I'm a Small Church Youth Worker!: Achieving Big-Time Success in a Non-Mega Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Youth Specialties, 2004). Grassel devotes his chapter two to the fact that small church ministry differs according to location, and he identifies "suburban" as one of the distinct kinds of locations, yet he does not specifically deal with the unique advantages of a small suburban church.

Significance of the Study

My hope is that this study will help leaders and parents in small suburban churches recognize and develop assets for youth ministry that they might not otherwise have recognized. This will help offset a perceived bias in the youth ministry literature, a bias that will be discussed in the literature review in chapter two and that can create an environment in which the excellence of smaller churches is overlooked because they do not fit the accepted youth ministry models.

Recognizing and developing these assets may prove particularly beneficial to church planting teams. In my own experience, getting a viable youth ministry started has been a challenge ever since the initial church planting began with my former church. The church I recently served, which started as a church plant sixteen years ago, is a good example of the struggle which church planting leaders face in developing youth ministry if the church does not quickly grow to become a large church.

This study can also be helpful to parents in small suburban churches, or those considering a small suburban church, who struggle with the question of what is the best church environment for their children as they reach the teenage years. Should they immediately seek the large church, with all of the resources a large youth ministry can provide for their children? Are there other assets which a small suburban church brings to the task of helping youth grow spiritually, which may make it a better choice for some families? Recognizing the assets of a small suburban church, and knowing how they can be developed, can help parents as they seek the best church environment for their children. The study can also provide data for church leaders as they counsel parents who

are considering whether or not they should stay with a smaller church as their children

grow.

It is important for church leaders and parents to recognize and develop the assets

in small suburban churches because there are so many small churches in America. I have

not found any source which quantifies the percentage of small churches that are in

suburban areas,[12] but there is plenty of data about the large number of small churches.

My assumption is that the number of small churches in suburban areas is significant.[13]

Lyle Schaller has written about how significant the number of small churches is.

> The natural and predictable tendency is (a) for Protestant churches to be small and
> (b) for larger congregations to shrink in size as the decades roll past.
> In the year 2020, congregations averaging fewer than a hundred in worship will
> represent at least 40 percent of all the Protestant churches in the United States and
> Canada—and that proportion may be closer to 50 percent. In those denominations
> with a strong pro-small congregation orientation and a powerful anti-large church
> bias, that proportion may exceed 70 percent in 2020.[14]

Beyond merely the quantity of small suburban churches, this study is important

because small suburban churches have an important role to play in reaching the diversity

of people in the United States. A considerable percentage of the population consists of

people who prefer small organizations. Van Horn concludes that 25 percent of the

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[12] In searching the American Theological Library Association Religion Database, I found no category for small suburban churches, and very little was listed under the heading of suburban churches. I only found two resources that even use the category "small suburban church." They are Van Horn's book, referenced earlier, and Rich Grassel's book, mentioned in footnote 11. Neither of these resources quantifies the number of small churches which are suburban churches.

[13] The community of Olney/Brookeville/Sandy Spring/Ashton, Maryland, where I recently served, is a northern suburb of Washington, DC. In surveying the 13 churches in this local suburban area, I found that 8 out of the 13 have an average weekly worship attendance of less than 200. That means 62 percent of the churches in this suburb are small suburban churches. This information comes from telephone interviews conducted by the author with various Olney area churches, October 2, 2002.

[14] Lyle E. Schaller, *The Small Membership Church: Scenarios for Tomorrow* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 13.

population prefers the relational intimacy of a small church over a megachurch.[15] In other words, we cannot reach the world with a one-size-fits-all church. We will always need small churches in order to reach the people who are attracted to small organizations. As Gary McIntosh, a nationally recognized church growth consultant says in his well-titled book *One Size Doesn't Fit All*, "Some people are attracted to one particular size church."[16]

Small suburban churches tend to discount their own importance. McIntosh encourages small churches to focus on things they do well:

> Good things are happening in small churches. Unfortunately the low self-image of most small churches leads them to see their weaknesses rather than their strengths. One solution to improve self-esteem in the small churches is to call attention to the positives in the church.... Talk about your strengths rather than your weaknesses.[17]

This study can help small suburban churches recognize and communicate their strengths for youth ministry. Van Horn confirms the need for this, because church growth researchers have found that youth ministry is a priority to baby boomer and baby buster generations. To reach these generations one must be able to minister to their children, yet these families are quick to move to larger churches with larger youth ministries. "Over and over again families move from small churches to larger churches only because the larger church has a large, active youth ministry."[18]

This study is also significant to the larger discussion of the need to rethink our models of youth ministry. DeVries argues that it is time "for a paradigm shift in our

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[15] Van Horn, *Defining a Role for a Small Suburban Church*, xii.

[16] Gary L. McIntosh, *One Size Doesn't Fit All: Bringing Out the Best in Any Size Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1999), 167.

[17] Ibid., 148.

[18] Van Horn, *Defining a Role for a Small Suburban Church*, 25.

approach to working with teenagers."[19] Regardless of what the actual programs used

have been or the style of ministry employed in various places, DeVries observes, the

most common characteristic of traditional youth ministry has been "the isolation of

teenagers from the adult world and particularly from their own parents."[20] DeVries

argues that it is time to reexamine that approach.

DeVries also questions our current structures for youth ministry. He uses a

colorful term to describe the result. He calls age-stratified ministries "orphaning

structures."

> Orphaning structures provide support and connection for people only so long as
> they fit into the age group of that particular organization. Many orphaning
> structures provide teenagers with a high degree of support and involvement. But
> in the end, without the support of a lifelong nurturing structure, a young adult's
> life becomes fragmented and rootless.[21]

The problem is that the youth's connections were with the youth group, not with

the church. When they graduate, and no longer fit the category for the youth group,

many feel confused and lost, needing a new place to belong. "Unfortunately,

contemporary churches have been much more effective in providing young people with

meaningful connections to the orphaning structure of the youth group than to the lifelong

structure of the church."[22]

This study is significant to this larger discussion about the need to rethink our

models of youth ministry because the very nature of small churches may tend to address

these types of concerns. Small church youth groups may contain assets for youth

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[19] DeVries, *Family- Based Youth Ministry*, 17.

[20] Ibid., 21.

[21] Ibid., 116.

[22] Ibid., 116-117.

ministry that have not yet been adequately recognized, and that would make them valid models that need to be considered.

Definition of Terms

- **Small.** For this study, a small church is one having an average worship attendance of 200 or fewer. In defining a small church, Van Horn found definitions ranging from an active membership under 40 to an active membership under 250. For his own study, he defined a small church as one having a membership, including all ages, of 100 or under.[23] Church growth researcher and teacher Gary McIntosh defines a small church as one of between 15 and 200 members. Churches of this size comprise 80 percent of all churches in America.[24] For the purposes of this study I have used the McIntosh definition of a small church, although McIntosh recognizes that there could be further breakdowns within this category of small, smaller, and smallest.[25] One modification I have made to the McIntosh definition is that, instead of using membership as the measure, I will use worship attendance. As Schaller observes, "Since there are huge differences in how congregations define who is a member, a more uniform yardstick is worship attendance."[26] So for this study, a small church is one having an average worship attendance, including all ages, of fewer than 200 people.

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[23] Van Horn, *Defining a Role for a Small Suburban Church*, 48.

[24] McIntosh, *One Size Doesn't Fit All*, 22.

[25] Ibid., 18.

[26] Schaller, *The Small Membership Church*, 44.

- **Suburban.** I have used proximity to a city and to other churches to help define a

    suburban church. *American Demographics* magazine ran an article about the

    difficulty of defining suburban. "Defining urban and rural is as easy as pie. But

    defining suburbia–and the relationship between urban, rural, and suburban–is

    more like trying to explain the mystery of Pi." This article went on to say, "We

    all know what it is, but it's hard to put into words." *American Demographics*

    finally endorsed what it called the standard definition of a suburb, but cautioned

    that the definition has many drawbacks, "The standard definition identifies

    suburbs as the part of a metropolitan area that lies outside central-city limits."[27]

    For the purpose of this study, a suburban church is a church that is located outside

    the central-city limits of a city of 50,000 or more inhabitants,[28] and which is in

    close proximity to two or more large churches. McIntosh defines a large church

    as having over 400 members.[29] The thing that marks a suburban church is the

    available options that families have when choosing a church, or when choosing to

    remain part of a particular church.

- **Spiritual Growth.** Spiritual growth is defined as the process of growing into

    maturity in Christ. In Ephesians, chapter 4, the Apostle Paul compares the

    spiritual growth process to the growth of a human body. God's goal is for us to

    become mature in our faith, as opposed to being infants, and we do that as we are

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[27] "Slippery Suburbs," *American Demographis* 15 (June 1993): 6.

[28] This size is based on the United States Census Bureau definition of a metropolitan statistical area (MSA). See http://www.census.gov/population/www/estimates/aboutmetro.html (accessed October 2, 2002).

[29] McIntosh, *One Size Doesn't Fit All,* 22.

part of a larger body, the Body of Christ.[30] DeVries indicates that the spiritual

growth of youth involves two paradoxical tasks:

> On the one hand, they need continuity with tradition, a faith community to
> be nurtured in. But on the other hand, they need to step away from their
> inherited tradition and develop a faith of their own–not their mother's
> faith, the pastor's faith or their best friend's faith. These two tasks often
> work against each other. But unless we address *both* of these needs, our
> youth ministries will be limited in their long term effectiveness.[31]

Perry G. Downs, professor of Christian education at Trinity Evangelical

Divinity School says that the reason why both of these tasks are necessary is that

there is a danger of people being merely socialized into a Christian subculture

without ever really coming to know the Father.[32] Downs observes that this is

particularly true of persons at the stage of faith development which is typical of

teenagers:

> A limitation of this stage is the overdependence on significant people
> within the community of faith. Pastors, youth leaders, or other significant
> persons are depended on both for judgments regarding truth ("What do we
> believe about…?) and self-worth…one is highly susceptible *to the tyranny
> of "they,"* allowing external control to become all important.[33]

Luder Whitlock, former president of Reformed Theological Seminary,

further develops the analogy of physical growth as a way to understand spiritual

growth, noting that just as a newborn baby is helpless and dependent, unable to

care for itself, so those "who experience a new spiritual birth are spiritually

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[30] Ephesians 4:11-16.

[31] DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 132.

[32] Perry G. Downs, *Teaching for Spiritual Growth: An Introduction to Christian Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 162.

[33] Ibid., 116. [emphasis his]

dependent, weak, and ignorant, like infants."[34] As people grow spiritually, they should be expected to become less and less dependent. Using Whitlock's analogy, we can expect the teenage years to be a time of transition spiritually, just as they are physically. Teens still need nurture spiritually, even as they develop and become less dependent on the faith of others.

Downs uses the biblical concept of faith to develop his theological understanding of growing to maturity in Christ. Spiritual growth is a growth in faith, but faith should be measured in three dimensions, as will be seen below.[35] Whitlock observes that we have to avoid the tendency to confuse the means and the end. Such things as Bible study, prayer, and participation in worship are methods that can help us grow spiritually, but they do not guarantee faith.[36] Whitlock defines the end as becoming more like God, being conformed to the image of Christ.[37]

But how can we tell if someone is becoming more like God? Whitlock proposes that we can recognize whether a person is growing spiritually through observing the extent to which the attributes of God are expressed in that person's life.[38] So we measure spiritual growth through observing changes in a person's life.

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[34] Luder G. Whitlock, Jr., *The Spiritual Quest: Pursuing Christian Maturity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 165.

[35] Downs, *Teaching for Spiritual Growth*, 17.

[36] Whitlock, *The Spiritual Quest*, 29.

[37] Ibid., 30.

[38] Ibid., 38.

- **Contribute.** For the purposes of this study, the way I have determined if something contributes to spiritual growth is to use Downs' proposal of three different dimensions in which our faith needs to grow. We need to grow, or change, in the cognitive, emotional, and volitional dimensions.[39]

> Christian faith is a matter of what we believe, whom we love, and how we behave. Its components are rational, relational, and behavioral, all combining to make up the substance of faith. Spiritual maturity, then, is a matter of holding to correct beliefs, loving God more deeply, and living in growing obedience to God. Together these three aspects are necessary for spiritual maturity.[40]

In this sense, faith is more than merely intellectual belief:

> Educational ministries that help people grow in faith must help people turn their hearts toward God. They must not only *understand* the truth, but *also be captured by* the truth.... The distinction between content and emotion in faith is the distinction between passive and active belief.[41]

Further, faith has to be demonstrated in one's life. "Christian maturity is living out the truth in the arena of life. It is the doing of truth and not merely the hearing or understanding of the truth."[42]

Anything that helps students grow in at least one of these three dimensions of faith is an asset contributing to the spiritual growth of youth. For a church to do a good job in helping youth grow spiritually, it needs to address each of these three dimensions of faith.

Contributions to spiritual growth should not be seen as limited to the growth of those already in the church. Those who are outside the church will also

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[39] Downs, *Teaching for Spiritual Growth*, 17-18.

[40] Ibid., 59.

[41] Ibid., 19.

[42] Ibid., 161.

grow as the Holy Spirit leads them to Christ. Wesley Black, veteran youth worker

and departmental chair at Southwestern Baptist Seminary, emphasizes, "The

Great Commission has at least two emphases–reach all you can and teach all you

reach (Matthew 28:19-20)."[43] Both evangelism and discipleship contribute to

spiritual growth.

- **Asset.** I use the word "asset" in the sense in which it is used by the Search

  Institute in its extensive body of research aimed at defining and measuring the

  developmental assets needed by American youth. The kind of assets that the

  Search Institute seeks to find are those factors that help to increase positive

  outcomes and to protect youth against high-risk behavior. The Search Institute

  recognizes both external assets and internal assets.[44] The definition of an asset for

  the purpose of this study is anything which contributes to the spiritual growth of

  youth. Assets can be more than just the things we typically think of as physical

  assets, such as money or physical plant and equipment; assets can include

  relational and intangible items.

- **Youth.** This study defines youth using the same grade parameters as those used

  by Peter Benson in the Search Institute study on developmental assets among

  American youth. Benson's study considers youth as those people who are in

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[43] Wesley Black, "The Preparatory Approach to Youth Ministry," in *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church: Inclusive Congregational, Preparatory, Missional and Strategic,* ed. Mark H. Senter III (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 2001), 44.

[44] Search Institute research recognizes eight different categories of developmental assets needed by American Youth: Support; Empowerment; Boundaries and Expectations; Constructive Use of Time; Commitment to Learning; Positive Values; Social Competencies; and Positive Identity. Peter L. Benson, et al., *A Fragile Foundation: The State of Developmental Assets among American Youth* (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1999), xi.

grades 6–12.[45] "Youth" is an intentionally broader term than "youth group."

Wesley Black expands the definition of youth ministry to include "everything a

church does with, to, or for teenagers. In fact, under the banner of youth ministry

is anything that a congregation does that touches the lives of teenagers in any

way, formally or informally."[46]

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[45] Ibid., v.

[46] Black, "The Preparatory Approach to Youth Ministry," in *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church*, 43.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature on Small Churches

It is important to explore youth ministry in small suburban churches because there

are so many small churches in America. Lyle Schaller has written about the important

place of the small church:

> The small church is the normative institutional expression of the worshiping
> congregation among the Protestant denominations on the North American
> continent. One fourth of all Protestant congregations on this continent have fewer
> than thirty-five people in attendance at the principle weekly worship service, and
> one half average less than seventy-five.[1]

In the previous chapter, I quoted Schaller's remarks from one of his later books,

where he projects that the small church will continue to have a dominant role in the

future: "The natural and predictable tendency is (a) for Protestant churches to be small

and (b) for larger congregations to shrink in size as the decades roll past."[2]

If all the small churches in a community were to either close or grow into big

churches, that would leave a significant number of people on the sideline. Douglas

Walrath, in his Foreword to Anthony Pappas' book *Entering the World of the Small*

Church, talks about the people who thrive in small congregations. "When their small

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[1] Lyle E. Schaller, *The Small Church Is Different!* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), 11.

[2] Lyle E. Schaller, *The Small Membership Church: Scenarios for Tomorrow* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 13.

church becomes large they either find another small church to join, or sadly, stop participating in church altogether."[3]

Often it is older people who are small-organization-type people, but this mindset is not exclusive to them. Some youth are oriented that way, too. Church health researcher and consultant Kennon Callahan compares church size to college size. Many small colleges are weak, but many are doing quite well. The same is true with large regional universities. Some students are drawn to the small colleges and what they have to offer, while others are drawn to the large universities and what they have to offer. The small colleges who get in trouble, Callahan maintains, are those who forget who they are and forget who they are trying to reach. The really difficult place to be, in Callahan's opinion, is in the middle, neither large nor small. Most medium-sized colleges are gone.[4] If there is still a vital place for small colleges, then that implies that youth are divided into small-organization and large-organization-type people, too, and so there must be a place for the youth groups of smaller churches.

Schaller maintains that the environment for small churches in our society has changed. Our culture used to be a culture of small organizations, but it has become a culture of big institutions. This creates an environment that is less supportive of the small church, and it also creates an environment where a decreasing number of people, if they have a choice, would choose a small church.[5]

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[3] Douglas A. Walrath, "Foreword" to *Entering the World of the Small Church*, by Anthony G. Pappas, 2nd ed. (Besthesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 2000), vii.

[4] Kennon L. Callahan, *Small, Strong Congregations: Creating Strengths and Health for Your Congregation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 10-11.

[5] Lyle E. Schaller, *The Small Membership Church*, 12, 14.

Callahan looks at the same trend toward bigness in our culture, but draws the opposite conclusion. Callahan believes that even for those who are not small-organization-type people, small organizations will have an important place in the future. Callahan sees a vital need for the development of small congregations which are also strong. He sees such churches as the key church type for outreach in the twenty-first century:

> The twenty-first century is the century of small, strong congregations. More people will be drawn to small, strong congregations than any other type of congregation. Yes, there are many mega-congregations; their number is increasing greatly. Nevertheless, around the planet, the vast majority of congregations will be small and strong, and the vast majority of people will be in these congregations.[6]

Callahan finds a reason for people preferring the small in our need to find a way to deal with the immensity of the universe. The more immense we perceive our universe to be, and the more our communities and organizations tend to be big, the more we "have developed deep-seated longings for community," a sense of community that helps us "discover roots, place, and belonging intimately and immediately." He then summarizes: "the immensity of the universe strengthens our attraction to the small."[7]

Callahan uses as a case study a conversation he had in an airport while waiting for a plane:

> I struck up a conversation with a man sitting nearby. I learned that he works as part of a large American corporation. He was sharing with me how big the corporation has become in recent years. He went on to describe his cabin on a lake, where he and his family can share close, immediate relationships. He told me how, when he takes his wife out to dinner, they go to a small, intimate

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[6] Callahan, *Small, Strong Congregations*, 12-13.

[7] Ibid., 17.

restaurant. It is their favorite place. The larger the corporation has become,
the more important the cabin and the restaurant have become for him–to have
a sense of balance.[8]

People have a need for a small place in their lives, a need which a small

church could fill. But one problem, as Callahan sees it, is that the church as a whole

has followed the culture in glorifying bigness.

> We have made the near-fatal mistake of assuming that only big equals
> strong.... As the culture became preoccupied with bigness, the church became
> preoccupied with bigness. We determined to match the culture bigness for
> bigness. The bigger some institutions in the culture became, the more we
> sought to create bigger and bigger churches.... The truth is that bigger is
> bigger, not necessarily better. The truth is that small is smaller, not
> necessarily better. God invites you and your congregation to share a mission
> that matches both the mission field God gives you and the strengths with
> which God blesses you.[9]

Christian Schwarz reports on a study of over 1,000 churches from 32

countries which found that small churches typically have a higher quality ministry

than larger churches:

> On nearly all relevant quality factors, larger churches compare disfavorably
> with smaller ones. Here are just two examples. In minichurches (under 100),
> 31 percent of all in attendance have, according to the pastor, an assignment
> corresponding to their gifts; in megachurches, this figure is a mere 17
> percent.... In minichurches, 46 percent of those who attend services have been
> integrated into a small group, whereas in megachurches this is true of only 12
> percent. The scenario is just as dramatic for nearly all of the 170 variables
> which we used to rate a church's quality.
>
> Aren't there any examples which might demonstrate just the opposite
> –churches which are large and at the same time growing numerically and
> characterized by high quality? Yes, there are such churches. And they are so
> unique, so exceptional that they are the talk of the whole world ("news is what
> is different"). They are truly the exception to the rule, indeed quite
> spectacular exceptions.
>
> We should rejoice that these examples exist. Yet we should avoid
> making these churches into models for others. It seems to me to be far more

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[8] Ibid., 18.

[9] Ibid., 14-15.

helpful to carefully examine the countless smaller churches manifesting high quality, strong growth, and innovative multiplication. If we need models at all, we should look for them in this category.[10]

The problem with holding up megachurches as a model is that the model does not work well with churches of different sizes. For a church to be a strong church while it is small, it needs to do what a small church does well. As Kennon Callahan expresses it: "Small does small very well. Small does not try to do 'mini-mega.'"[11]

Since a small church is not merely a small version of a large church, it has different assets or different strengths that it brings to ministry. Callahan sees the recognition and development of these assets as being the key to becoming a strong church. "The tendency of weak congregations is to try to do something that does not match their strengths and, along with that, to try to do too much. The art is learning to focus on only the few, key, essential strengths and priorities that deliver the future."[12]

The thing that marks a suburban church is the available options that families have when choosing a church, or when choosing to remain part of a particular church. Because of these available options, and particularly the tendency of families to switch to a different option when their children approach the teenage years, it is necessary for a small suburban church to identify and communicate its youth ministry assets. If the small suburban church has assets in this area, it is important to define what they

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[10] Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996), 48.

[11] Callahan, *Small, Strong Congregations*, 15.

[12] Ibid., 11.

are, develop them, and communicate them to the families in the church and in the community.

Schaller highlights the growing reality of competition among churches in all localities. He does not regard it as a bad thing, but as something which needs to be taken into account. What Schaller reports as being true generally, I would expect to be especially true of suburban areas.

> The competition is greater, and fewer churches are unaffected by it. The increase in the number of automobiles per 1,000 residents, the widespread expectation that everyone should enjoy the freedom of choice, the erosion of inherited institutional loyalties, the increased number of marriages across denominational and faith lines, and the contemporary demand for quality are five of the reasons behind this greater degree of competition among the churches for new members.[13]

In much of my research on small churches, I grew frustrated in what appeared to me to be a bias toward small, rural churches. It was refreshing to find the book by Callahan maintaining that small churches can be appropriate for any type of community.

> We could be in a large city, a good-sized town, or a remote, rural area. Our sense is that God gives us strengths, gifts, and competencies to develop small, strong congregations. It is not that we start small congregations in areas with small populations and large congregations in areas with large populations. In many metropolitan areas, precisely because of their vastness and bigness, immensity and complexity, a small, strong congregation is the way forward for many people.[14]

Callahan goes so far as to call for the planting of many new small, strong congregations. And he calls the small congregations themselves to be involved in the planting efforts:

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[13] Schaller, *The Small Membership Church*, 62.

[14] Callahan, *Small, Strong Congregations*, 308.

We are wise enough to know that small, strong congregations are in the best position to start new small, strong congregations.... a number of large, regional congregations do not do well in starting new *small, strong* congregations.... In effect, the large, regional congregation starts a new "mini" large, regional congregation.[15]

Literature on Youth Ministry

The need to pay more attention to developing the strengths of small, suburban churches coincides with the need to reexamine what we are doing in the area of youth ministry. DeVries cites feedback from participants in youth ministry conferences who complain, "What worked five or ten years ago with teenagers is just not working anymore."[16]

DeVries questions whether even "successful" youth ministries are producing the right result. He questions whether they are producing mature Christian adults. The success of a youth ministry is not known until years after the students graduate, when one can see what kind of adults they have become. The task of youth ministry is to look beyond the short-term objectives of building a large youth group, to the long-term goal of laying a lasting foundation.[17] That leads DeVries to ask the question: "Could it be that the majority of our efforts in programming and publicity may, in fact, be moving teens away from rather than toward mature Christian adulthood?"[18]

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[15] Ibid., 312. [emphasis his]

[16] Mark DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry: Reaching the Been-There, Done-That Generation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 22.

[17] Ibid., 24.

[18] Ibid., 28.

Other writers have raised similar concerns. Mark Senter, a professor at

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and a former youth pastor, notes that the life-

cycle of a particular approach to youth ministry in the United States is about 50 years.

The current approach, pioneered by Youth for Christ and Young Life, now shows

signs of being near the end of its life-cycle. Senter maintains that it is probable that

the time is right for a new revolution in youth ministry.[19]

In a later book edited by Senter, he specifically addresses the problem of what

happens to youth after they graduate from the youth group. "Before graduation, very

few teens find spiritual nurture outside the youth ministry ghetto. And after

graduation, only a minority integrate into the larger body of believers."[20]

Senter maintains that this result is built into the very structure of the

traditional approach to youth ministry:

> The youth ministry was built upon a flawed discipleship model that was
> firmly rooted in modernity: based on the twin assumptions of specialization
> and discontinuity, the youth ministry resembled a factory model of nonformal
> education, which came to dominate formal education in the latter part of the
> 19th century.

He explains that factories produce their product using an assembly line. Many

hands contribute in specialized ways to produce the product, such that no one person

is fully responsible. Schools use this model. Churches follow a schooling model of

discipleship, which Senter describes as turning the church into a factory.

"Discontinuity of relationships and specialization of content become the normal way

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[19] Mark Senter III, *The Coming Revolution in Youth Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1992), 21.

[20] Mark H. Senter, III, "Of Churches, Youth Groups, and Spiritual Readiness: The Context of the Debate," in *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church*, ed. Mark H. Senter, III (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), xiv.

of doing education."[21] This model causes youth to be divided from adults, with the youth further sorted according to age into "chronological ghettoes."[22]

Senter does not question the sincere desire of many within this structure to see youth assimilated into the larger community of the church, but notes that the very nature of the structures we have created work against it:

> Specialists gifted in youth evangelization championed the Young Life, Youth for Christ, and Fellowship of Christian Athletes movements. Hosts of similar youth evangelization agencies followed, including some associated with denominations. Their profound desire was to disciple youths into local churches. Yet discontinuity and specialization produced such a gap that few adolescent converts found their way into fellowship with believers in local churches.[23]

Senter ultimately proposes a different solution than does DeVries. Senter gives up on trying to integrate the youth into the current church, and instead proposes using each generation of youth to start a new church. They are therefore able to keep the continuity of relationships:

> The Strategic approach creates a community of leaders and youthful Christians that enables a parachurch or church-based youth ministry to establish a new church to maintain a theological continuity while expressing faith in a community relevant to both Christ and culture. Why do we call this the Strategic approach to youth ministry? Primarily because it calls upon the youth ministry to be and become a holistic intergenerational church that is relevant to the world in which it lives.[24]

Kenda Creasy Dean of Princeton Theological Seminary and Methodist minister Ron Foster summarize what we have learned after a hundred years of youth ministry:

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[21] Mark H. Senter III, "The Strategic Approach to Youth Ministry," in *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church*, ed. Mark H. Senter, III (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 115.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., 116.

[24] Ibid., 117.

the youth group is notoriously unreliable for fostering ongoing *faith*. The youth group model...created an environment in which youth...had only marginal contact with the rest of the body of Christ. The congregation worshiped in the sanctuary; youth met in the basement. The congregation gathered on Sunday mornings; youth gathered on Sunday nights. The congregation listened to sermons; youth heard "youth talks." The congregation had Bible study; youth had devotions. The congregation had a budget; youth had a bake sale.

Nothing that happened in the life of the congregation as a whole looked even vaguely familiar to youth ghettoized in youth groups and vice versa. In parachurch ministries, the gap between youth group and congregation widened even further. Although parachurch ministries preserved certain theological foci commonly lost in congregational youth groups (for instance, the emphasis on repentance and personal salvation), parachurch clubs met at school or in homes during the week, and most had only minimal connections–if any–to a worshiping congregation.

The upshot of the overwhelming dominance of youth-group models of ministry was a deepening chasm between youth ministry and the theology of the church as a whole. When youth graduated from the "youth group"–the only form of ministry many young people had ever experienced–they effectively graduated from the church as well.[25]

DeVries uses the case of a student he calls "Johnny" to illustrate the danger of losing supposed converts when they are nurtured in youth groups with no continuity with the larger church body. While Johnny was in the youth group, he was a dynamic student leader. Yet when he graduated from college, he came to see his Christian commitment as something he did when he was young. The problem, as DeVries understands it, was the failure to connect Johnny with mature Christian adults–adults who loved God passionately.[26]

In anticipating the direction he suggests as a solution, DeVries uses the analogies of a mechanic and a surgeon. To fix a problem in an engine, the mechanic can isolate or remove the defective parts, fix them, then reinstall them. The surgeon

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[25] Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998), 30.

[26] DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 133.

cannot usually do that with body organs. Most organs die if removed from the body, sometimes causing the body to die, too. The surgeon has to treat the difficulty within the context of the total body. Too many people look at youth ministry through the eyes of a mechanic. They try to isolate the youth and fix them. But to lead teenagers to mature Christian adulthood, DeVries maintains that we have to look at them through the eyes of a surgeon. We have to see them as "connected to the total body of Christ, not isolated from it."[27]

In a 1991 study commissioned by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, Kenda Creasy Dean found that:

> Religious youth programming, then, succeeds to the extent that it fosters "positive connections" between adolescents and significant adults, peers, the religious community and God. Governing this relationship-centered process is the assumption that relationships can change people, and that positive adolescent development can be nourished by incubation in a caring community. Religious youth programs serve as such incubators, providing youth with an environment which maximizes the possibility of healthy development not only spiritually, but socially, emotionally, and morally as well.[28]

A best-selling secular study reported the same conclusion regarding the importance of connections. Journalist Patricia Hersch did a qualitative study of eight selected adolescents in Reston, Virginia, over a period of three years.[29] She describes adolescence as a journey, but one that is meant to occur in a context. But for today's teens, the context has been uncertain. They need adults they can follow as role

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[27] Ibid., 43.

[28] Kenda Creasy Dean, *A Synthesis of the Research on, and a Descriptive Overview of Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish Religious Youth Programs in the United States* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1991), 52-53.

[29] Patricia Hersch, *A Tribe Apart: A Journey Into the Heart of American Adolescence* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 25.

models. They also need rites of passage that can help give them meaning and a place

in the adult world. Instead of having that kind of steadying context, they have grown

up in an environment "that lacks consistency and structure." So Hersch summarizes,

"The main problems for today's adolescents are found…in the search for identity in

an amorphous and unpredictable environment."[30]

The result has been that the adolescents have formed their own culture:

> In the vacuum where traditional behavioral expectations for young people
> used to exist, in the silence of empty homes and neighborhoods, young people
> have built their own community. The adolescent community is a creation by
> default, an amorphous grouping of young people that constitutes the world in
> which adolescents spend their time. Their dependence on each other fulfills
> the universal human longing for community, and inadvertently cements the
> notion of a tribe apart. More than a group of peers, it becomes in isolation a
> society with its own values, ethics, rules, worldview, rites of passage, worries,
> joys, and momentum. It becomes teacher, adviser, entertainer, challenger,
> nurturer, inspirer, and sometimes destroyer.[31]

In the epilogue to her book, Hersch reiterates the need youths have for vital

connections with adults:

> The lives of the kids in this book illustrate in subtle and not so subtle ways the
> need for adult presence to help them learn the new lessons of growing up.
> Kids need adults who bear witness to the details of their lives and count them
> as something. They require the watchful eyes and the community standards
> that provide greater stability. They need appreciation for who they are. It
> may be as simple as it was for Chris and Charles, who find succor and
> encouragement in their homes and in sports. It may be as complicated as it
> was for Ann, who developed ways to be nurtured in the homes of others when
> her own failed her. The kids in the book who do best are those who have a
> strong interactive family and a web of relationships and activities that
> surround them consistently.[32]

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[30] Ibid., 18-19.

[31] Ibid., 21.

[32] Ibid., 363.

Hersch goes on to tell what kids will lack if they do not make these connections. They will lack the input of those who are more mature. "Without a link across generations, kids will only hear from peers."[33]

DeVries emphasizes what the students will lose if they hear only from their peers:

> Teenagers will not learn the skills required of mature adults in the peer-centered Sunday School class. They will not learn these skills by talking with their friends. The process occurs as the less mature repeatedly have the opportunity to observe, dialogue and collaborate with the more mature. By denying teenagers opportunities for this kind of involvement with adults, our culture sends many youth into the "adult" years relationally, mentally and morally unprepared for the challenges of adulthood.[34]

DeVries describes the problem as "being stuck." Young people easily become stuck in the peer culture. They need connections with adults to be able to move beyond adolescence into maturity.[35] DeVries explains that the dynamic involved concerns the very nature of cultures: "One of the prime functions of a culture is to perpetuate itself and its values. In the same way, the development of a separate youth culture has functioned to perpetuate adolescence."[36]

In the Carnegie Council study on youth ministry, Kenda Creasy Dean identified various delivery systems for youth ministry, which include: youth groups, formal instruction, worship, residential experiences (such as retreats and camps), youth leadership development, community service, Jewish community centers (for

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[33] Ibid., 364.

[34] DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 49.

[35] Ibid., 48.

[36] Ibid., 55.

Jewish teenagers), and adult-youth relationship.[37] All these share a common trait of

"a structure which facilitates the formation of a significant community for

adolescents."[38] But it is the last one that is seen as the most important: the making of

connections between youth and adults. "Religious youth leaders view all other forms

of religious youth communities as vehicles to this primary form, the relationship

between youth and the adults who work with them."[39]

To the extent that making these connections is at the heart of youth ministry,

this would seem to provide an avenue through which small suburban churches could

develop their unique strengths to excel in youth ministry. Particularly since small

churches are relational and intergenerational, they should be able to excel in making

these connections. Yet a recent study of youth workers in the United States, reported

by Merton Strommen, Karen E. Jones and Dave Rahn, found that small church size

does not correlate well with the spiritual development of youth. According to survey

results, it is the larger churches and the larger youth groups which are best at

nurturing spiritual growth in youth. The study found that "the larger the youth group,

the higher youth ministers evaluate their youth's spiritual development." They found

the same relationship when considering the size of Sunday morning worship

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[37] Kenda Creasy Dean, *A Synthesis of Research*, 44-51.

[38] Ibid., 44.

[39] Ibid., 51.

attendance, "Those whose average Sunday morning worship attendance exceeds

1,000 draw the highest evaluations on 'spiritual development.'"[40]

Strommen contrasts his study with the study by Christian Schwarz, cited

earlier, concerning the health of small churches. Schwarz found that "on nearly all

relevant quality factors, larger churches compare disfavorably with smaller ones."[41]

Strommen particularly highlights Schwarz's finding that the evangelistic

effectiveness of mini-churches is 1,600 percent greater than that of the megachurch.[42]

Strommen then notes that the findings of the study he reports of youth workers are

reversed from those of Schwarz. It is the larger youth groups and larger churches that

have the higher quality youth ministry, for it is in these larger groups that "the

spiritual development of youth is perceived as being best achieved."[43]

There may be an unintended bias in Strommen's study toward large youth

groups and large churches because of the composition of the group sampled. The

study began with a gathering of 7,500 youth ministers from all over the country in

1996. From this group, a sample of 2,130 full-time youth ministers was asked a

series of questions which helped develop items used in the study.[44] Then a sample of

2,416 full-time youth ministers was selected randomly from lists supplied by

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[40] Merton Strommen, "Evaluating Priority Outcomes: What Is Youth Ministry Achieving Today?" in *Youth Ministry That Transforms: A Comprehensive Analysis of the Hopes, Frustrations, and effectiveness of Today's Youth Workers*, ed. Merton Strommen, Karen E. Jones, and Dave Rahn (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, Youth Specialties Academic, 2001), 159.

[41] Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*, 48.

[42] Strommen, *Youth Ministry that Transforms*, 160, Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*, 48.

[43] Strommen, *Youth Ministry that Transforms*, 160.

[44] Merton Strommen, "Introduction" to *Youth Ministry That Transforms*, 9.

denominational offices and two parachurch ministries. These youth ministers were given a 260-item paper-and-pencil survey which served as the research data for the study.[45]

However, using only full-time youth ministers eliminates the perspective of all those churches which do not have full-time youth ministers. These may be churches that are too small to afford a full-time youth worker, as well as those churches who have consciously chosen a different model for youth ministry than one which would require a full-time youth minister. The sample introduces an unintended bias into the study.

Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster claim that this kind of bias has been present in the literature since the early 1900s.[46] This bias can create an environment such that some excellent small churches do not recognize their excellence, because they do not fit the accepted models. Dean and Foster give a case study on one such church:

> During a youth ministry consultation for a cluster of Maryland churches, one pastor asked if I might meet with his small congregation individually. "We're so much smaller than the rest of these churches," he said. "We only have one hundred people in worship on Sunday morning. But we have a lot of teenagers–about thirty every Sunday in worship, about the same number in Sunday School–and so we really need a youth ministry."[47]

The authors then report their reaction to this minister's plea:

> Needless to say, I was thinking: *One-third of the people in the pews every Sunday are teenagers? Why don't you come and consult with me!* This pastor assumed that because his congregation did not have a youth group, his church

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[45] Ibid., 11.

[46] Dean and Foster, *The Godbearing Life*, 29.

[47] Ibid.

did not "do" youth ministry. During our conversation, he quickly realized that his congregation had a great deal to offer this cluster of churches in terms of youth ministry. Besides a cadre of caring adults who knew every teenager in the congregation by name, this church's youth "program" turned out to be regular and intergenerational responses to crises. After a hurricane, flood, or fire, the congregation–teens included–loaded up a caravan of tents and supplies and headed to the crisis site. They camped out and served meals to local relief workers and persons in need. These weekends became high points in the life of the congregation and reminded youth and adults alike of their unique calling as Christians to a troubled world.[48]

In comparing the studies by Schwarz and Strommen, we need to also consider how the sample used by Schwarz may have influenced his results. Schwarz's sample was an international sample drawn from 32 different countries.[49] However, one might speculate that size impacts quality in a different way in the United States than in other countries. Schwarz's sample would not account for that.

In her analysis of the results of the Strommen study, of which she was a co-author, Karen E. Jones notes that, theoretically, small churches should have significant assets for youth ministry, but this study indicates that these assets are not being effectively developed:

> According to our research, these potential benefits of small youth groups are not being realized. With all the possibilities of a more personal, fruitful ministry with smaller groups, why are these ministers significantly less satisfied than those with larger numbers? Is it possible that they have simply failed to take advantage of their unique opportunities and have, instead, wasted energy and resources attempting to imitate larger ministries? Whatever the causes for this discrepancy between potential and reality, youth ministers in smaller communities and congregations must begin to capitalize on their assets.[50]

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[48] Ibid. [emphasis theirs]

[49] Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*, 18.

[50] Karen E. Jones, "Setting Ministry Goals: Significant Goal Modifiers," in *Youth Ministry That Transforms: A Comprehensive Analysis of the Hopes, Frustrations, and Effectiveness of Today's Youth Workers*, ed. Merton Strommen, Karen E. Jones, and Dave Rahn (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, Youth Specialties Academic, 2001), 250.

One difficulty that small churches have in building on their assets for youth

ministry is that not much has been written on this subject, so there are few published

resources available. Rick Chromey is one writer who has written on the unique

challenges and opportunities of youth ministry in small churches. The substance of

what he has written he has mostly had to discover through trial and error in working

with small church youth ministries. He wrote to fill in the gap of written resources, to

provide the kind of information that would have helped him in his own ministry.[51]

Another difficulty that small churches face in developing their assets is that

they do not usually have a full-time youth minister who can devote time to

discovering and developing these assets. As Chromey points out, usually the youth

leader in a small church is either a volunteer with limited time, the solo pastor who

also has to be concerned with shepherding the whole church, or a part-time youth

worker who has to juggle youth ministry with other competing time demands. Even

if a small church has a full-time youth worker, that individual usually carries other

multiple responsibilities. Small churches prize generalists, and even if they can

afford to hire specialists, they tend to turn them into generalists.[52] Without having

someone with the time to focus primarily on the youth ministry of the church, it is

difficult for a small church to identify its assets and to develop a mission to direct its

youth ministry.

An understanding of its mission is crucial for a small church. A small church

does not have the resources to do everything, but what it does do it can do well if it is

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[51] Rick Chromey, *Youth Ministry in Small Churches* (Loveland, CO: Group Books, 1992), 7-8.

[52] Ibid., 134-152.

focused as the church's mission to the community. As Kennon Callahan says, "The church that tries to do a multiplicity of missions scatters the resources with which God is blessing it."[53] Therefore, Callahan recommends:

> Small, strong congregations share one excellent mission. You will notice that I emphasize *one excellent mission.* As healthy congregations, they share one compelling mission with considerable competence, compassion, and continuity. Their mission is more than mere interest. They do not trifle, whimsically, in now this and now that fashionable mission.... They do not do mission hopping. They focus on one excellent mission.[54]

Since the small church usually does not have the leadership resources to develop a mission for its youth ministry, and since a small church needs to focus on one excellent mission rather than a multiplicity of missions, a solution may be to tie the youth ministry into the overall mission of the church. It is not a separate ministry with a separate mission, but part of the overall mission of the church. This goes along well with Doug Fields' challenge in *Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry* to stop treating our students as the future church: "Students aren't the future of the church; they're the present church, just like all other believers.... We should be challenging youth to be ministers and to participate in the faith today instead of sitting back and waiting until they are adults."[55]

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[53] Callahan, *Small, Strong Congregations,* 38.

[54] Ibid., 34-35. [emphasis his]

[55] Doug Fields, *Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry: 9 Essential Foundations for Healthy Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 174.

Literature on Spiritual Growth

Having looked at some of the literature on small churches, and then at some of

the literature on youth ministry, we turn our attention now to the issue of spiritual

growth. Spiritual growth can be considered from several different angles.

One of these is the theological angle. We can speak of spiritual growth as

being a growth in sanctification. The Westminster Shorter Catechism makes a

distinction between justification and sanctification. Justification is described as "an

act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as

righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received

by faith."[56] In contrast to justification, which is a singular act, sanctification is an

ongoing work of God's free grace. The Shorter Catechism defines sanctification as

"the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the

image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto

righteousness."[57] Spiritual growth involves both the decisive pardon and acceptance

that comes from Christ's righteousness being credited to us in justification, and the

process of renewal that comes from the work of God's free grace in sanctification.

Jay Adams, in a book relating sanctification and counseling, touches on some

of the dynamics involved in sanctification:

> The Bible sets forth sanctification as a process (not an act) in which three
> forces, the Spirit, His Word, and the regenerated saint, all *work together* to
> bring about change. It is vital to understand this essential fact and to keep all
> three of these forces in a harmonious and complementary relationship.[58]

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[56] Westminster Shorter Catechism #33.

[57] Westminster Shorter Catechism #35.

[58] Jay E. Adams, *Growing by Grace: Sanctification and Counseling* (Stanley, NC: Timeless Texts, 2003), 24. [emphasis his]

People from differing theological positions see these forces interacting in different ways. In fact, whole books have been written comparing the various approaches to sanctification. I will not review the literature on sanctification here other than to note that it is the first angle from which to view spiritual growth, and to point out that, from a Reformed perspective, the fellowship of the church is an important part of sanctification. Reformed theologian Sinclair Ferguson comments:

> The fellowship of the church is the context in which sanctification matures, and in this sense is also a means for its development. For sanctification involves our attitudes and actions in relation to others. The love which is the heart of imitation of Christ (compare to 1 Cor 13) cannot be isolationist; the death of our inordinate love of self is tested therefore in fellowship. This is the thrust of Paul's exposition of true sanctification in the context of weak and strong sharing the same fellowship: "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself" (Rom 15:1-3).[59]

The personal relationships in a small church should provide an opportunity for this kind of fellowship, in which people can know the teens well enough to recognize what the Holy Spirit is doing in the students' lives. The relational strength of a small church should help the church be an instrument of God's grace in the life of each student, whether for justification, or for sanctification. The whole church can be involved, not just a specialized ministry within the church.

In my own denomination, when a child is baptized into non-communicant membership in the visible church, the congregation is required to give an affirmative answer to the following question: "Do you, the members of this Congregation, in the name of the Church of Christ, undertake with these parents the Covenant responsibility for the Christian nurture of this child?" This question recognizes the

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[59] Sinclair B. Ferguson, "The Reformed View," in *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification,* ed. Donald L. Alexander (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 71-72.

need for a supportive environment in the congregation, where the child receives both

care and instruction. It also makes the nurture of the child the responsibility of the

entire church. *The Book of Worship of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church*

further describes what the congregation's promise involves:

> The parents of the child promise to bring him up to love God and serve Him,
> and the members of the congregation likewise promise to surround the child
> with their concern and love in Christ, that he may continue in the fellowship
> of the Church, confess Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and live in His
> eternal Kingdom.[60]

James W. Fowler gives us another angle through which we can look at

spiritual growth. Fowler espouses a theory that personal faith develops through a

progression of definable stages. In his book *Stages of Faith,* he presents a picture of

faith development that draws heavily from the theories of cognitive development of

Jean Piaget, and the theories of moral development of Lawrence Kohlberg.[61] Fowler

was also influenced by the psychosocial framework of Erik Erikson in the way he

listened to and analyzed the faith stories of individuals interviewed in his research.

While Piaget and Kohlberg helped Fowler understand the structure of faith, Erikson

helped him understand the function of faith at the different stages.[62]

For Fowler, "Faith is not always religious in its content or context.... Faith is

a person's or group's way of moving into the force field of life. It is our way of

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[60] *The Book of Worship of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church*, chapter VIII.A.2., "The Baptism of Children," in *The Standards of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church* (Greenville, SC: General Synod of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, 2001) 270-271.

[61] James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1981; first HarperCollins paperback edition, 1995), 37-105 (page references are to the 1995 edition).

[62] Ibid., 106-114.

finding coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that make up our lives."[63]

In the introduction to this book, Fowler states, "In these pages, I am offering a theory of growth in faith. At the heart of the book you will find an account of a theory of seven stagelike, developmentally related styles of faith...."[64]

Fowler makes a distinction between the content and the structuring of faith. The structures of faith can be seen across not only different religions, but also across "the less explicit faith orientations of persons and groups who can be described as secular or eclectic in their belief and values orientations."[65] Because of that, we have to insert the Christian God in place of Fowler's "a center of value and power that bears the weight of ultimacy for us" throughout his stages of development in order to appreciate the value of his theory for Christian spirituality. In other words, then, our relations with one another as Christians are grounded in a third relationship, which is our relationship to God. Throughout his description of stages, we have to insert the Christian content to make Fowler's theory into one that specifically informs Christian spiritual development.

Development through the different stages is not the only way that our faith grows and changes, according to Fowler. It is really only one of three ways that we grow and change:

> Change begun in one of these areas of our experience may well precipitate change in another. Yet I think that the distinctions between them may be helpful: (1) *Developmental change:* By this I point to change that results from

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[63] Ibid., 4.

[64] Ibid., xiii.

[65] Ibid., 56.

the maturation and formation of the self. (2) *Reconstructive change:* Here I will discuss change as breakdown and rebuilding, restoration and healing, conversion and transformation. (3) *Change as response to intrusive marker events:* Intrusive marker events are those times when disruptive events happen to us that affect our lives pervasively. They alter the patterns of our lives fundamentally. A marker event is one after which in some significant sense one's life is never the same again.[66]

In an earlier place, Fowler describes developmental change as being "*evolutionary* changes in the way faith imagines;" that is, it evolves over time in our life. On the other hand, reconstructive change involves "*revolutionary*" changes in faith's centering; that is, conversion.[67] He also writes that "conversion has to do with changes in the *contents* of faith."[68] As such, it "can occur in any of the faith stages or in any of the transitions between them."[69] By contrast, developmental change does not mean a change in the content of our faith. "A transition from one faith stage to another does not necessarily mean a change in the *content* or *direction* of one's faith. It does mean, however, changes in the ways one holds, understands, and takes responsibility for living one's faith."[70]

Fowler maintains that we need both the developmental and the reconstructive views of change to fully understand how we grow spiritually. "I am glad that we do not have to negate one of these options in the study of religious experience and faith in order to embrace and affirm the other, for both perspectives make indispensable

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[66] Fowler, *Faith Development and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 100-101.

[67] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 34.

[68] Ibid., 282.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Fowler, *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 68.

contributions to our understanding of the ways faith changes and the qualities that constitute the faith to change."[71]

Fowler uses the concept of ecology to describe the ways in which a congregation can support spiritual growth. One way is through the care and cure of souls. Fowler calls the church an "ecology of care." This comes out of the "richness of relationships in the interdependent community of the congregation." It is seen in the church's formal activities, but even more so in the informal activities of the congregation. The other way is through the formation and transformation of persons, in which the church is seen as an "ecology of vocation." This includes not just one's occupation or career, but all the ways in which one responds to "God's call to partnership." It also includes the way that call exercises "ordering power in a person or community's priorities and investments of self, time, and resources."[72]

While development in faith comes from the work of the Holy Spirit and from the way we respond to the challenges we face in life, Fowler asserts that a congregation can create an ecology that helps support our growth. Part of being an ecology of care is to provide a ministry of sponsorship. This includes providing sponsors–people who have gone before us and know the way–as well as providing theological resources. Part of being an ecology of vocation is to communicate clearly and to create an environment where "ongoing growth and change in faith and vocation are expected and will be supported."[73]

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[71] Ibid., 87.

[72] Fowler, *Faith Development and Pastoral Care*, 20-21.

[73] Ibid., 114-116.

We can communicate and create that environment through: (1) our preaching, by offering dynamic examples of faith and calling; (2) celebrations of rites of passage and the recognition of development of faith and vocation; (3) providing periodic faith development and vocation inventories and checkups, which includes taking seriously the faith biographies of people; (4) providing contexts where people can be helped in healing the disjunctions between their public and private lives; and (5) helping people come to terms with strangers and their responsibilities to strangers, including the stranger within oneself, the strangers who are fellow members of the covenant community, the stranger who is Jesus, and the strangers in our communities.[74]

The approach to spiritual growth proposed by Fowler would seem to offer much room for a small suburban church to develop its strengths. The relational and intergenerational nature of the small suburban church should result in areas of strength for providing a supportive ecology of care. The way a small church relies on volunteers and gets everyone involved should result in areas of strength for providing a supportive ecology of vocation. A possible weakness to overcome in the area of an ecology of vocation is that of helping people come to terms with strangers. A small church needs to be challenged to remain outward looking.

Another angle from which to look at spiritual growth is that of desired outcomes. "Desired outcomes" refers to the kind of mature Christians we want to see our youth ministry producing. "Desired outcomes" also means the kind of impact we desire the church to have on people in the congregation, the community, and the culture.

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[74] Ibid., 117-119.

Merton P. Strommen and Richard A. Hardel propose a new paradigm for youth and family ministry based on "four decades worth of studies conducted by Search Institute, which are broadly enhanced by corroborative research from other sources."[75] They also draw from the examples of dynamic congregations, as well as from their own personal experiences.[76]

Strommen and Hardel's new paradigm is built around the desire to produce Christians whose maturity is demonstrated through ten characteristics.

> The vision we authors present in this book is a partnership between family and congregation that will encourage and support the ten characteristics that mark a life of commitment to Jesus Christ and a life of witness and service. We have identified the following ten characteristics:
>
> 1. Trusting in a personal Christ.
> 2. Understanding grace and living in grace.
> 3. Communing with God regularly.
> 4. Demonstrating moral responsibility.
> 5. Accepting responsibility in a congregation.
> 6. Demonstrating unprejudiced and loving lives.
> 7. Accepting authority and being personally responsible.
> 8. Having a hopeful and positive attitude.
> 9. Participating in the rituals of Christian community.
> 10. Engaging in mission and service.[77]

The authors maintain that we have to consider "the interactive effect of four levels of influence: family, congregation, community and culture. Each level of influence makes a significant contribution to the characteristics we desire for our children and youth, and each level needs to be part of our ministry."[78]

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[75] Merton P. Strommen and Richard A. Hardel, *Passing On the Faith: A Radical New Model For Youth and Family Ministry* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, Christian Brothers Publications, 2000), 10.

[76] Ibid., 11.

[77] Ibid., 17-18.

[78] Ibid., 18.

While all four levels are involved, the family is the most powerful. The probability of producing the desired outcome is greatest when the family connections to each other and to God are strong. The authors use the term "probability" because, since faith is gift of God, we cannot guarantee that specific children will grow in spiritual maturity.[79]

One difficulty with looking at outcomes is that we have to look beyond the teenage years to see how the youth actually turn out. What kind of adults do they become? DeVries argues that we really do not know the "success" of our youth programs until about ten years after the youth have graduated. We cannot effectively judge the outcome by whether or not we have a "strong Youth program" (that is, having many youth involved in these activities).[80]

Longitudinal studies are necessary in order to see how participation in the youth ministry of a church impacts long-term spiritual growth. DeVries did an informal longitudinal study by looking at how the youth from his former youth ministry had turned out ten years later.

> It is now ten years since I left Waco. Almost without exception, those young people who are growing in their faith as adults were teenagers who fit into one of two categories: either (1) they came from families where Christian growth was modeled in at least one of their parents, or (2) they had developed such significant connections with adults within the church that it had become an extended family for them. *How often they attended youth events (including Sunday School and discipleship groups) was not a good predictor of which teens would and which would not grow toward Christian adulthood.*[81]

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[79] Ibid.

[80] DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 63-64.

[81] Ibid., 63. [emphasis his]

In a footnote DeVries talks about the one possible exception mentioned in the

paragraph above.

> The only notable exception to this pattern were those young people who,
> although they did not connect with adults in the church, created their own
> adult extended family by becoming ministers (including joining the staff of
> parachurch organizations like Young Life, Youth for Christ, Campus Crusade,
> InterVarsity or the Fellowship of Christian Athletes) or marrying ministers.[82]

Wesley Black proposes a model of youth ministry which he calls "The

Preparatory Approach to Youth Ministry." This approach sees the purpose of youth

ministry as "*the development of mature Christians in the church, both now and for*

the future."[83] This approach, in focusing on the outcome–mature Christians in the

church – expands the definition of youth ministry to include "everything a church

does with, to, or for teenagers. In fact, under the banner of youth ministry is anything

that a congregation does that touches the lives of teenagers in any way, formally or

informally."[84]

This kind of intentional approach based on desired outcome requires long-

term planning.

> Churches today often think in terms of a six-year span – the years between
> seventh and twelfth grades–in their ministry with youths. What would we like
> to see happen in the lives of teens before they graduate from high school?
> How can we best guide them through the teen years and into adulthood?
> What will we do each year to build on prior experiences, while always
> providing for those who just entered the youth division? How will we relate
> to youths at several levels of spiritual maturity through our programming and
> organization?... A six-year plan to deal with all areas of the Bible, all major
> biblical doctrines, mission lifestyle and strategies, and developmentally

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[82] Ibid., 205.

[83] Wesley Black "The Preparatory Approach to Youth Ministry," in *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church*, ed. Mark H. Senter III (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 42. [emphasis his]

[84] Ibid., 43.

focused life issues will contribute significantly to a purposeful youth ministry.[85]

Black's proposal helps us see what is needed to focus and plan around desired outcomes. My question would be: Why limit the time frame to a six-year plan? Why not a twelve-year plan or eighteen-year plan, to recognize the continuity in a child's life from early childhood to adolescence?

Another difficulty with this approach is getting churches to look at outcomes rather than at programs. In describing how they helped lead one church through the process of defining desired outcomes, Strommen and Hardel tell what they learned.

> Listening to teams trying to agree on a simple statement of outcome was a great learning experience for us. We began to realize that most people in a congregation do not think in terms of outcomes they hope to see as a result of a church's ministry. Rather, they tend to think in terms of programs–that is, how something might be done. To get the participants to describe an outcome, we asked them to complete every action statement with the words, "so that...." This moved them to describe a specific outcome of a specific action.[86]

The desired outcome is not necessarily the same as purpose. Doug Fields, in *Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry*, describes five purposes of youth ministry which can be discovered from the Bible. These are: reach, connect, grow, discover, and honor. These are all actions that drive the ministry.[87] But these are not desired outcomes. Later, Fields does describe the outcome desired in the student's lives: to move students from being part of the crowd to being fully committed core students who are involved in ministry. This desired outcome then helps Fields to produce a series of

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[85] Ibid., 57.

[86] Strommen and Hardel, *Passing On the Faith*, 301.

[87] Fields, *Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry*, 43-52.

steps that need to be mastered along the way. This is what he calls "the process."[88]

The process flows out of the desired outcome. This, as much or more than the

purpose statement, seems to provide the needed direction for Fields' ministry.

Looking at desired outcome would seem to help small churches avoid the trap

of trying to duplicate the ministry of larger suburban churches. If we focus on

programs, our definition of youth ministry will be program centered, and we will be

tempted to model our ministry after those churches which have great programs.

These are usually the larger churches. If we look instead at the desired outcome, we

can then look at the total environment of our particular church, and we can seek out

the assets we have to produce the desired result.

We can also look at spiritual growth through the angle of discipleship. This is

closely related to the angle of outcome, but it focuses more on the process by which

we grow into spiritual maturity. It is also related to the angle of stages of faith, but it

differs in that it does not deal with a generic growth in faith; rather, it focuses

specifically on a Christian's growth as a follower of Christ.

Jim Petersen writes out of his experiences as a missionary to Brazil. Prior to

that, he had been actively involved in a discipleship ministry for many years. In his

previous work in discipleship, there had been a greater supply of students wanting to

be discipled than the time available to disciple them. Therefore, the discipler could

be selective in choosing those who appeared most ready to grow, and could prescribe

the curriculum. If the student did not keep up with the program, that freed the

discipler to move on to someone else. But when Petersen got to Brazil, he found that

there were not so many students ready to be discipled. The discipler could not just

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[88] Ibid., 210-227.

drop one student to move on to someone else who was more ready. He sees this as

being true now not just of Brazil, but of our modern culture as a whole.

> Before the enlightening experiences in Brazil, I had viewed discipleship as a
> system of information and disciplines that resulted in the mastering of a body
> of knowledge and a set of skills. So I organized a syllabus of information and
> how-tos, and busied myself with passing it on to people I was helping. But
> something wasn't right. It finally dawned on me that I was forcing my agenda
> on everyone, and it didn't truly fit anyone. I needed to learn to begin at the
> other person's starting point.[89]

In addition, Petersen also found that he needed to de-emphasize the line

between evangelization and discipleship.

> The line between evangelizing a person and helping them follow Christ as a
> disciple is really unimportant. Too often we make too much of it.... We
> would do far better, and the new believer would do far better, if we would
> simply continue doing the things that helped him find Christ in the first place:
> exploring the Scriptures together and talking about what they mean.[90]

Petersen looks to the metaphor of parenting to help him understand the task of

discipling. This is the most common metaphor used in the New Testament to

describe bringing someone to maturity in Christ.[91]

> The primary goal of spiritual parenting is to see the discipled person rooted
> and built up in Christ. This is an ongoing process that will continue
> throughout the person's life.... This need must be very clear in our minds as
> spiritual parents because it will dictate the kind of nutrition we will provide
> for our spiritual children. It is so easy to stuff growing Christians with junk
> food. Junk food can be anything that is not the pure spiritual milk Peter wrote
> about. It might be taking people through the latest Christian book on the most
> current topic rather than into the Scriptures. The books might fill their heads
> with good ideas, but only the Scriptures can fill their hearts with Christ.[92]

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[89] Jim Petersen, *Lifestyle Discipleship: The Challenge of Following Jesus in Today's World* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1993), 20.

[90] Ibid., 20-21.

[91] Ibid., 42-43.

[92] Ibid., 50.

Petersen proposes two questions that can guide the discipleship process. They are the two questions Paul asked when confronted by Christ on the road to Damascus: "Who are you, Lord?" and "What shall I do, Lord?" They are relevant questions for us to ask regardless of where we are on our journey toward maturity.[93]

Petersen sets aside a day about once every six months to review where people in his life are in their walk with Christ. He then decides how to proceed over the next six months.[94] This is similar to the process Doug Fields goes through with parents in his youth ministry. At least once each year, Fields has one of his youth leaders meet with all parents who express an interest to develop a spiritual life plan for their teenager. This plan helps "determine how parents and ministry can work as a team to encourage the teenager's spiritual life."[95]

Another author who writes on discipleship is Dallas Willard. In *The Divine Conspiracy*, Willard writes out of a concern that the gospel message has not sufficiently gripped the hearts and minds of Christians in the Church. We have reduced the Christian message to "a gospel of sin management."[96] Also, according to Willard, "we now live in a time when consumer Christianity has become the accepted norm.... By contrast, the biblical pattern is, from beginning to end, 'Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only.'"[97]

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[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid., 62-63.

[95] Fields, *Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry*, 266-267.

[96] Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 41.

[97] Ibid., 311.

Willard calls the discipleship process "a curriculum for Christlikeness." For

this curriculum he contrasts four things that are not to be the primary objectives with

the two things that are.

       Four things that are not to be our primary objectives:

- "External conformity to the wording of Jesus' teachings about actions in specific contexts."
- "Profession of perfectly correct doctrine."
- "Faithfulness to the activities of the church or other outwardly religious routines."
- "Various "spiritualities," or the seeking out of special states of mind or ecstatic experiences."[98]

These all are things that happen as a result of inner transformation, but they

cannot themselves produce transformation. "The human heart must be plowed more

deeply,"[99]

       Our two primary objectives:

- "To bring apprentices to the point where they dearly love and constantly delight in that "heavenly Father" made real to earth in Jesus."
- "To remove our automatic responses against the kingdom of God, to free the apprentices [from]...their old habitual patterns of thought, feeling, and action."[100]

Willard uses the illustration of the "Golden Triangle of spiritual growth" to

describe how three factors work together to produce growth. He describes these three

factors as being like the three angles of a triangle. At the apex is the work of the Holy

Spirit, since the Holy Spirit's action is the most important factor. At one end of the

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[98] Ibid., 320.

[99] Ibid., 321.

[100] Ibid., 321-322.

base of the triangle are the ordinary events of life. At the other angle is our planned

discipline to put on a new heart. So these three factors work together: the work of

the Holy Spirit, our response to the circumstances of life, and our adoption of certain

practices which help position us to respond appropriately.[101]

The literature on discipleship is not aimed specifically at youth. Yet whatever

we do with youth to help them grow spiritually fits into the larger framework of

discipleship. By looking at spiritual growth through the angle of discipleship, we

gain the perspective that it is an ongoing process, and that it needs to be fitted to the

individual. We do not graduate from being disciples. A smaller church could have a

potential advantage in discerning where individual youth are in the process, and be

able to fit an individual spiritual growth plan within the overall ministry of the

church.

Another angle on spiritual growth is the angle of context. What impact does

context have on spiritual growth? What kind of context best supports spiritual

growth?

In his book *The Safest Place On Earth*, Christian counselor Larry Crabb

reports that he has changed his whole approach to counseling because of the impact

on spiritual transformation he has discovered in the context of the local church. "For

about a hundred years, we have assumed that emotional problems like unreasonable

and chronic irritability have an underlying cause that can properly be called a

psychological disorder. An *expert* is necessary for *treating* that disorder."[102] He then

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[101] Ibid., 347-350.

[102] Larry Crabb, *The Safest Place On Earth: Where People Connect and Are Forever Changed* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1999), 46.

talks about the power to change that he, and others, have discovered in relationships with non-professionals who relate well.[103] Therefore, in the master's program where he teaches, the instructors have "shifted to a spiritual formation model of personal change. Our focus is on developing students into spiritual friends and spiritual directors."[104]

Crabb's book *The Safest Place on Earth* is about his "developing views on the largely untapped power of spiritual community to change lives...."[105] He sees the church reaching its potential as a context for promoting change when it gets its purpose right. According to Crabb, this purpose is "to draw people into Christ, to mirror Christ to one another, to show Christ to others by the way we live."[106]

The Search Institute has developed a way to measure how well a community does in providing a good context for healthy growth. As reported in *A Fragile Foundation: The State of Developmental Assets among American Youth*, the Search Institute has identified a framework of 40 developmental assets.

> This framework identifies 40 factors of young people's growth and development. Together, the assets offer a set of benchmarks for positive child and adolescent development. The assets clearly show important roles that families, schools, congregations, neighborhoods, youth organizations, and others in communities play in shaping young people's lives.... By focusing on building these assets among all children and adolescents, communities have the potential not only to lessen high-risk behavior but also to nurture a generation of competent, caring and successful young people.[107]

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[103] Ibid., 46-47.

[104] Ibid., 48.

[105] Ibid., 6.

[106] Ibid., 183.

[107] Peter L. Benson, et al., *A Fragile Foundation: The State of Developmental Assets among American Youth*, (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1999), 2.

These 40 developmental assets are divided into eight categories. Four of the eight categories have to do with external assets–positive inputs from people and institutions in the young people's lives:

- **Support** – "Young people need to experience support, care, and love from their families and many others. They need organizations and institutions that provide positive, supportive environments."[108] The assets in this category are: 1) family support, 2) positive family communication, 3) other adult relationships, 4) caring neighborhoods, 5) caring school climate, and 6) parent involvement in schooling.[109]

- **Empowerment** – "Young people need to be valued by their community and have opportunities to contribute to others. For this to occur, they must be safe and feel secure."[110] Assets in this category are: 7) community values youth, 8) youth as resources, 9) service to others, and 10) safety.[111]

- **Boundaries and expectations** – "Young people need to know what is expected of them and whether activities and behaviors are 'in bounds' or 'out of bounds.'"[112] Assets in this category are: 11) family boundaries, 12) school boundaries, 13) neighborhood boundaries, 14) adult role models, 15) positive peer influence, and 16) high expectations.[113]

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[108] Ibid., 4.

[109] Ibid., 3.

[110] Ibid., 4.

[111] Ibid., 3.

[112] Ibid., 4.

[113] Ibid., 3.

- **Constructive use of time** – "Young people need constructive, enriching opportunities for growth through creative activities, youth programs, congregational involvement, and quality time at home."[114] Assets in this category are: 17) creative activities, 18) youth programs, 19) religious community, and 20) time at home.[115]

The other four of the eight categories concern internal assets – "internal qualities that guide choices and create a sense of centeredness, purpose, and focus."[116] The four internal categories are:

- **Commitment to learning** – "Young people need to develop a lifelong commitment to education and learning."[117] The assets in this category are: 21) achievement motivation, 22) school engagement, 23) homework, 24) bonding to school, and 25) reading for pleasure.[118]

- **Positive values** – "Youth need to develop strong values that guide their choices."[119] Assets in this category are: 26) caring, 27) equality and social justice, 28) integrity, 29) honesty, 30) responsibility, and 31) restraint.[120]

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[114] Ibid., 4.

[115] Ibid., 3.

[116] Ibid., 5.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Ibid., 3.

[119] Ibid., 5.

[120] Ibid., 3.

- **Social competencies** – "Young people need skills and competencies that equip them to make positive choices, build relationships, and succeed in life."[121] Assets in this category are: 32) planning and decision making, 33) interpersonal competence, 34) cultural competence, 35) resistance skills, and 36) peaceful conflict resolution.[122]

- **Positive identity** – "Young people need a strong sense of their own power, purpose, worth, and promise."[123] Assets in this category are: 37) personal power, 38) self-esteem, 39) sense of purpose, and 40) positive view of personal future.[124]

According to Benson, this developmental asset framework grows out of two types of applied research:

- **Prevention**, which focuses on protective factors that inhibit high-risk behaviors such as substance abuse, violence, too-early sexual intercourse, and dropping out of school; and
- **Resiliency**, which identifies factors that increase young people's ability to rebound in the face of adversity, from poverty to drug-abusing parents to dangerous neighborhoods.[125]

This framework was first introduced in 1990 with 30 developmental assets. It was revised to reflect 40 assets through the cumulative

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[121] Ibid., 5.

[122] Ibid., 3.

[123] Ibid., 5.

[124] Ibid., 3.

[125] Ibid., 6.

sampling of over 350,000 sixth through twelfth graders from more than 600

communities between 1990 and 1995.[126]

One major purpose of this framework is to give a comprehensive view of the

multiple elements that contribute to healthy human development. Because of that,

more important than the strength of the individual assets is the cumulative benefit of

the assets working together.[127]

The disturbing finding of the study of the state of developmental assets among

American youth is that, "of the 40 assets, 27 are experienced by half or less of the

young people surveyed."[128] The average number of assets possessed by the youth

surveyed is only 18 out of 40.[129]

Strommen and Hardel discuss how the development asset paradigm can help a

church in developing its ministry to youth.

> Since most congregations find themselves in communities where the average
> number of assets experienced by their youth is only eighteen of the forty
> assets, they need to consider how they can become a catalyst for increasing
> this number. A congregation could, for example, introduce asset-building
> programs that other community organizations can use, or focus on helping
> youth discover a personal faith, knowing that a personal faith builds assets.[130]

Strommen and Hardel go on to show how congregations are in a good position

to help the overall community with asset building programs. They also give

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[126] Ibid.

[127] Ibid., 14.

[128] Ibid., 32.

[129] Ibid., 34.

[130] Strommen and Hardel, *Passing On the Faith*, 238.

examples of how congregations can promote intergenerational activities that build

assets by promoting "meaningful interaction among children, youth, and adults."[131]

But then Strommen and Hardel bring this asset developing ministry into the

perspective of the overall purpose of the church's ministry to youth.

> Congregations' ultimate mission is to nurture faith in Jesus, the Christ.
> Achieving the forty developmental assets, though an important goal for
> congregations, is not their ultimate goal. Limiting a youth ministry to
> building assets could result in nice kids who have no faith.
>   The assets paradigm, enormously useful in addressing the issue of
> unhealthy communities in the secular arena, must be limited to a language all
> groups in a community can use. Because of our pluralistic society, the
> paradigm cannot include in its list the most powerful asset of all: faith in
> Jesus Christ; hence, a congregational ministry must be seen as having two
> objectives:
>
> - to build these assets in the lives of both its own youth and families and
>   those of the community.
> - to bring the youth and adults it serves into a conscious commitment to
>   Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.[132]

Strommen and Hardel see the spiritual growth of youth taking place within the

contexts of the family, the congregation, the community and the culture. They

propose what they call:

> a radical new model in which families and congregations enter into a
> conscious partnership of faith development.... The home as domestic church
> and the congregation as communal church form a community of faith.
> Together the home and church seek to impact, even transform, their
> community, culture, and world through acts of service and love.[133]

This is similar to the approach of DeVries, who regards the family and the

church (as an extended family), as the most important contexts for the spiritual

growth of youth. "The thesis of family-based youth ministry is that the family and

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[131] Ibid., 240-247.

[132] Ibid., 250-251.

[133] Ibid., 304.

the extended family of the church are the structures (or walls of the canal) that most naturally move a person toward faith maturity."[134] You need both of these working together. The family is the most important context. But family is not enough, you also need the extended family of the congregation as a support to the family, and as a context which can help to "overcome the spiritual deficits in the family of origin."[135]

Looking at spiritual growth through the angle of context should also provide opportunities for a small suburban church to discover and develop its assets. Part of the benefit of a small church can be the supportive context that it brings, along with the opportunity to promote relationships across generations.

Doug Fields, who has been good at developing a programmatic youth ministry in a larger church, is very sympathetic to the need to integrate the youth ministry, the church, and the family in a more effective way. Yet he raises two challenges which we have to address in any ministry that seeks to integrate the youth more into the overall ministry of the church. One is that neither the adults nor the youth want a totally integrated program. Most parents want a ministry *for* their kids not *with* their kids. And the kids' natural desire is for an experience with their peers and independent of their parents. The other challenge is that "most students have only been exposed to age-segregated youth ministry."[136] So when we speak of youth ministry, that is what they have come to expect. Both Fields and DeVries caution that one proceed slowly, using a series of progressive steps, in any attempt to develop a

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[134] DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 157.

[135] Ibid., 98.

[136] Fields, *Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry*, 252.

more family-based ministry.[137] These challenges and the caution are important to acknowledge as we seek to discover and develop the assets that a small suburban church brings to the task of the spiritual growth of youth.

Biblical Perspective on Spiritual Growth

These are all interesting angles for looking at spiritual growth, and each adds something important to our understanding of what contributes to the spiritual growth of youth. This chapter will now conclude with a review of some key Bible passages, looking at what they bring to our understanding of what contributes to the spiritual growth of youth.

Eph. 4:1-16 is a comprehensive passage that shows how various factors work together in spiritual growth. An evident theme in the whole passage is the need for both unity and diversity. In the first six verses, the emphasis is on unity, particularly beginning at verse four, where a repetition of the word "one" begins. Eph. 4:4-6 says, "There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." Then, beginning at verse seven, the Apostle Paul introduces the importance of diversity within that unity. Eph. 4:7 reads, "But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it." Paul further develops the importance of diversity by showing how God has gifted certain people to be leaders within the church. Then in Eph. 4:12-13, Paul tells us the reason for gifting certain people to be leaders within the Church, "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith

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[137] Ibid., and DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 175-177.

and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole

measure of the fullness of Christ."

This passage demonstrated how the Bible places individual spiritual growth

within the context of the building up of the overall body of Christ, His Church. We

become mature individually as the whole Body is built up, and we are all growing

toward the same objective, "attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

The final three verses in this passage show how our relationships with one

another help promote this growth. Notice how the unity and diversity come together

in dynamic relationship to promote growth in Eph. 4:14-16.

> Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and
> blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and
> craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in
> love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.
> From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting
> ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Ephesians 4 speaks of Christ being the goal of our growth. Our objective,

according to Eph. 4:13, "attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." Or,

as Eph. 4:15 puts it, "we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is,

Christ." That is consistent with what Jesus, himself, said in Lk. 6:40, "A student is

not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher."

The Bible tells us that Christ is not only the goal of our spiritual growth; He is

the power behind it. Gal. 2:20 says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no

longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son

of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

In fact, all three persons of the Trinity provide the power behind our spiritual

growth. Our spiritual growth is the work of the Holy Spirit. Gal. 3:1-3 says.

> You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

Since God is the creator, all life and all growth come from Him. When the Corinthians were arguing over the role of Paul and the role of Apollos, the Apostle Paul put the focus back on God who makes things grow. He says in 1Co. 3:5-6.

"What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe–as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow."

The Bible does not release human beings from responsibility for their spiritual growth just because the power behind the growth is ultimately from God. Paul spoke about his own exertion in Phil. 3:7-16.

> But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ–the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

In fact, God's work on our behalf can provide motivation to us to become what He desires us to become. Rom. 12:12 says, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in

view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God–this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is–his good, pleasing and perfect will."

The language in Romans 12, that we are no longer to "conform," but rather we are to "be transformed," parallels language used elsewhere by the Apostle Paul telling us to "put off" and to "put on." For example, Eph. 4:22-24 says, "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

Colossians 3 expands on that idea. According to Col. 3:1, our motivation comes from what God has done for us, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where is Christ is seated at the right hand of God." Because of this, there are things we are to "put to death." A paragraph on things we are to put to death begins with Col. 3:5, "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry." Then, in verse 12, the Apostle Paul tells us how we are now to clothe ourselves. Col. 3:12 says, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." Then Col. 3:13-17 firmly roots this in the context of our relationships to one another in the Church.

> Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.

And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Since, from a Biblical perspective, relationships within the church are crucial for spiritual growth, it is important to consider how a church can contribute to spiritual growth. And since small churches provide the potential to provide a rich context of relationships, it is important to consider how a small church can develop on its relational strengths. We will turn now to the methodology, to consider how we can discover the assets a small suburban church has to contribute to the spiritual growth of youth.

CHAPTER 3
PROJECT METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

This study was a qualitative case study employing multiple cases. The cases were chosen to represent best practice. Each case was analyzed individually, then the cases were compared to discover common themes.

A qualitative paradigm is defined by John W. Creswell, a recognized specialist in research designs and methods, as "an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting."[1] Creswell suggests using a qualitative paradigm "to explore a topic when the variables and theory base are unknown."[2] He also points to the language of qualitative studies. Qualitative studies use such words as: *understanding, discover,* and *meaning.*[3]

Since my purpose was one of discovery–to discover how small suburban churches can develop their assets to contribute to the spiritual growth of youth–this study used a qualitative design. There is only a small theory base regarding youth ministry in small suburban churches. The one place where I found a discussion of youth ministry in small suburban churches was in one chapter of a book on youth ministry in small churches by

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[1] John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 2.

[2] Ibid., 146.

[3] Ibid., 6.

Rich Grassel, a professor of youth ministry at Geneva College.[4] In a telephone

conversation, Professor Grassel indicated that he was not aware of any study of specific

small suburban churches, but he said that the study of specific churches would be very

helpful to our understanding of ministry in that environment.[5] The perspective from the

natural setting is important, and there has been little or no study of ministry to youth in

the actual environment of a small suburban church. A qualitative design was appropriate

for this study because it involves developing theory, understanding the natural setting,

and developing a holistic picture from which further inquiry can be made.

The case study was the qualitative method most appropriate to this study. Sharran

B. Merriam, professor of adult and continuing education at the University of Georgia,

defines a case study as an "intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single unit or

bounded system."[6] Merriam indicates when a case study design should be chosen.

> A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the
> situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than
> outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than
> confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy,
> practice, and future research.[7]

After deciding on a qualitative case study, the next factor to decide was what

single unit or bounded system to study. The unit of analysis chosen for this case study

was the individual church. Michael Quinn Patton, who has written widely in the area of

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[4] Rich Grassel, *Help! I'm a Small Church Youth Worker!: Achieving Big-Time Success in a Non-Mega Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Youth Specialties, 2002), 19-25.

[5] Rich Grassel, telephone interview by the author, May 21, 2003.

[6] Sharran B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1998), 12.

[7] Ibid., 19.

qualitative research and applied sociology, describes the key issue in deciding on the unit

to study.

> The key issue in selecting and making decisions about the appropriate unit of
> analysis is to decide what it is you want to be able to say something about at the
> end of the study. Do you want to have findings about individuals, families,
> groups, or some other unit of analysis?[8]

The goal of this study was to say something about small suburban churches.

Therefore the unit of analysis was the church. Each church was studied as a case.

The next issue was how to choose the particular cases to study. A key tenet of

qualitative research is that of purposeful sampling. Patton explains the difference in

sampling technique between qualitative and quantitative methods.

> Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even
> single cases (N=1), selected *purposefully*. Quantitative methods typically depend
> on larger samples selected randomly. Not only are the techniques for sampling
> different, but the very logic of each approach is unique because the purpose of
> each strategy is different.[9]

One recognized strategy for purposeful sampling is to choose extreme or deviant

cases. These are cases that stand out because they are different, usually because they are

either "outstanding successes or notable failures."[10] Patton continues with an

explanation.

> With limited resources and limited time, an evaluator might learn more by
> intensively studying one or more examples of really poor programs or one or
> more examples of really excellent programs. The evaluation focus, then, becomes
> a question of understanding under what conditions programs get into trouble and
> under what conditions programs exemplify excellence. It is not even necessary to
> randomly sample poor programs and excellent programs. The researchers and

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[8] Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods,* 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 229.

[9] Ibid., 230. [emphasis his]

[10] Ibid., 230-231.

intended users involved in the study think through *what cases they could learn most from* and those are the cases that are selected for study.[11]

In this study, I was trying to find the assets that small suburban churches may have which can be developed for contributing to the spiritual growth of youth. I chose to study churches which were recognized as doing a good job in contributing to the spiritual growth of youth, because these were likely to be churches which had identified and were utilizing their assets. This is what may be called a best-practice study.

Patton acknowledges that a weakness of using only one case, or a small sample of cases, is lack of generalizability.[12] But he clarifies that while only studying a few cases may prevent broad generalizations to all possible cases, *logical generalizations* can be made from studying the data produced even in a single, critical case.[13] In the introduction to his best-practice study of excellent protestant congregations, Paul Wilkes speaks of looking for reproducible excellence. "What we would look for in these churches would be approaches and programs that could be replicated in other places."[14]

One form of logical generalization is through shedding light on what could be. Janet Ward Schofield explains, in a paper written for the Office of Naval Research:

> ...I would like to argue that qualitative research on education can be used not only to study *what is* and *what may be* but also to explore possible visions of *what could be*. By studying what could be, I mean locating situations that we know or expect to be ideal or exception on some *a priori* basis and then studying them to see what is actually going on there.... When studying what could be, site selection is not based on criteria such as typicality or heterogeneity. Rather it is based on

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[11] Ibid., 232-233. [emphasis his]

[12] Ibid., 234.

[13] Ibid., 236-237.

[14] Paul Wilkes, *Excellent Protestant Congregations: The Guide to Best Places and Practices* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), xi.

information about either the *outcomes* achieved in the particular site studied or the *conditions* obtaining there.[15]

One approach to improving generalizability is to study more than one case. Merriam calls this a multiple case study. Multiple case studies are to be distinguished from studying one case with multiple subunits or subcases. A reason Merriam gives for using multiple cases is: "The more cases included in a study, and the greater the variation across the cases, the more compelling an interpretation is likely to be.... [this is] a common strategy for enhancing the external validity or generalizability of your findings."[16]

Robert K. Yin, president of the research and technology management firm Cosmos Corporation, discusses considerations for choosing the cases in a multiple case design.

> Any use of multiple-case designs should follow a replication, not sampling, logic, and an investigator must choose each case carefully. The cases should serve in a manner similar to multiple experiments, with similar results (a literal replication) or contrasting results (a theoretical replication) predicted explicitly at the outset of the investigation.[17]

For the purposes of replication of similar results, I used a best-practice method in selecting the churches to study. But to gain the greater variation which Merriam recommends for making the results of the study more compelling, I sought churches that use apparently different approaches in achieving a similar result. Specifically, I sought both a church that does well with evangelism, and a church that emphasizes more the

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[15] Janet Ward Schofield, "Increasing the Generalizability of Qualitative Research," from *Qualitative Inquiry in Education* (Teachers College Press, 1990); reprinted in A. Michael Huberman and Matthew B. Miles, *The Qualitative Researcher's Companion* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002,) 189.

[16] Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 40.

[17] Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 51.

discipleship of those already in the church. I also sought churches that are better at

different aspects of the three dimensions in which faith needs to grow, as identified by

Downs: cognitive, emotional and volitional.[18]

Another consideration in a multiple case design is choosing the number of

different cases to study. Yin notes that one factor involved here is the degree of certainty

one wants to have about the multiple case results. The greater the number of cases

studied, the greater the degree of certainty. Yet, Yin observes, one must use a replication

logic, not a sampling logic. This means that two or three literal replications may be

sufficient. The cases are not intended to be a sample which represents "a larger pool of

respondents (or subjects), so that data from a smaller number of persons are assumed to

represent the data that might have been collected from the entire pool."[19] To balance the

advantage of additional cases with the time and expense each case adds to the study, I

chose to study five cases.

Kathleen Eisenhardt, writing for the Academy of Management, explains why

somewhere between 4 and 10 cases is a good number with which to work.

> Finally, while there is no ideal number of cases, a number between 4 and 10 cases
> usually works well. With fewer than 4 cases, it is often difficult to generate
> theory with much complexity, and its empirical grounding is likely to be
> unconvincing, unless the case has several mini-cases within it, as did the
> Mintzberg and McHugh study of the National Film Board of Canada. With more
> than 10 cases, it quickly becomes difficult to cope with the complexity and
> volume of the data.[20]

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[18] Perry G. Downs, *Teaching for Spiritual Growth: An Introduction to Christian Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 17-18.

[19] Yin, *Case Study Research*, 47-50.

[20] Kathleen M. Eisenhardt, "Building Theories From Case Study Research," *Academy of Management Review* 14(4), 532-550, 1989; reprinted in Huberman and Miles, *The Qualitative Researcher's Companion*, 27.

As Patton observes, to someone who is more familiar with quantitative research designs, this sample size may seem quite small. But it only seems small compared to the sample size needed to generalize from a random sample to an entire population. Sample size depends on what you want to know. Sample size also involves a trade-off between breadth and depth. Given a fixed amount of time and resources, a researcher can choose to either study a larger sample in less depth–thus gaining more breadth–or the researcher can choose to study a smaller sample in greater depth. Sample size is related to purpose.[21]

To select five churches to study, I first developed a list of more than 20 small suburban churches that were recognized as doing well at contributing to the spiritual growth of youth. To develop this list, I contacted denominational leaders, seminary professors, and people who have studied the state of youth ministry in our country. I explained the nature of my study to these youth ministry leaders, and asked them for the names and contact information of churches they recognized as doing a good job in contributing to the spiritual growth of youth. Recognition by these key leaders was how I identified if a church represented best practice. A difficulty I experienced at this point was the lack of youth ministry leaders who were able to recommend small churches to study. As one para-church youth ministry leader, whom I will not identify, said, "Small churches don't do youth ministry well."

After developing this list of over 20 small suburban churches, I made a preliminary contact with each church to learn a little more about its ministry, to make sure it fit my criteria, and to discern its willingness to participate in the study. After these initial contacts, I choose five churches to be subjects of the study, based on the apparent

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[21] Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 244.

quality of their ministry, and based on my intention to capture different approaches to promoting the spiritual growth of youth.

Using cases representing different approaches helped guard against the tendency to reach premature or false conclusions. It provided more complex comparisons in the cross-case analysis. Before proceeding to cross-case analysis, the researcher must become thoroughly familiar with each individual case. This helps the researcher deal with the overwhelming volume of data; it also helps the researcher recognize unique patterns in each case, and "it gives investigators a rich familiarity with each case which, in turn, accelerates cross-case comparison."[22]

In addition to within-case analysis, Eisenhardt emphasizes the importance of thorough cross-case analysis. Good cross-case analysis involves looking at the data in many divergent ways. Part of the strategy for avoiding the tendency to reach premature conclusions involves comparing the similarities and differences of the cases.[23]

> Overall, the idea behind these cross-case searching tactics is to force investigators to go beyond initial impressions, especially through the use of structured and diverse lenses on the data. These tactics improve the likelihood of accurate and reliable theory, that is, a theory with a close fit with the data. Also, cross-case searching tactics enhance the probability that the investigators will capture the novel findings which may exist in the data.[24]

Choosing churches that use different approaches to promoting the spiritual growth of youth also increases the potential to replicate results of this study in other churches. Schofield notes, "Generally speaking, a finding emerging from the study of several heterogeneous sites would be more robust and thus more likely to be useful in

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[22] Eisenhardt, "Building Theories From Case Study Research," 17-18.

[23] Ibid., 18.

[24] Ibid., 19.

understanding various other sites than one emerging from the study of several very similar sites (Kennedy, 1979)."[25]

This procedure of choosing five churches which follow different paths to success in contributing to the spiritual growth of youth, then studying them and analyzing the data with both within-case and cross-case analysis, helps us recognize both commonalities and differences in assets and in the way these churches develop their assets, thus helping us understand better the range of assets a small suburban church may have to contribute to the spiritual growth of youth. This will increase the likelihood that a person reading this study will be able to find assets and approaches to assets which they can apply in a particular small suburban church.

Data Collection and Interview Design

Data collection for this study included observation, document analysis, and interviews. Observation was through an onsite visit to each church, which could include Sunday services, inter-generational activities, or activities specifically geared toward youth. Document analysis included studying policy statements, budgets, and any written publicity, websites, or internal communication pieces related to youth ministry. Three to ten interviews were conducted for each case. Interviews included selected people in leadership positions in the church, selected people directly involved with youth ministry, selected parents of youth, and selected youth. The people interviewed were not determined in advance; this was determined onsite after initial observation, and after beginning the interview process and gaining more understanding of who needed to be interviewed.

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[25] Schofield, "Increasing the Generalizability of Qualitative Research," 184.

A semi-structured format was used for these interviews. According to Merriam, a semi-structured interview "is guided by a set of questions and issues to be explored, but neither the exact wording nor the order of questions is predetermined."[26] The research questions provided the direction for the interviews. (See the interview guide in the Appendix) In some cases, a focus group was substituted for some of the interviews when initial interviews at a site suggested that the focus group would be more effective.

There are advantages in using different types of data collection. For one thing, it is a way to achieve triangulation. Patton explains this term:

> The term *triangulation* is taken from land surveying. Knowing a single landmark only locates you somewhere along a line in a direction from the landmark, whereas with two landmarks (and your own position being the third point of the triangle) you can take bearings in two directions and locate yourself at their intersection....[27]

As Patton observes, different types of data are sensitive to real world nuances in different ways. Using just one type of data collection makes a study more vulnerable to errors. Different data collection methods allow for cross-data validity checks. Even if the different types of data reveal inconsistencies, these inconsistencies provide greater insight into the phenomenon under study.[28]

Limitations of the Study

Major limitations of this study were those of time and resources, which necessitated studying only five cases. This is the trade-off between depth and breadth mentioned earlier.

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[26] Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 93.

[27] Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 248.

[28] Ibid.

Related to this was the limitation stemming from the fact that only a few youth

ministry leaders recommended churches to study. The entire list of over 20 potential

churches came from only a few recommendations. The majority of youth ministry

leaders I contacted could not name a small suburban church which they recognized as

doing a good job of contributing to the spiritual growth of youth. Even Rich Grassel,

who wrote a book about youth ministry in small churches, and who specifically included

the category of small suburban churches in his book, could not identify a church he

would recommend for this study.[29]

This lack of recommendations may indicate that not many small suburban

churches do youth ministry well, or it may be a further indication of the potential bias I

mentioned in chapters one and two, that the assets of small suburban churches are not

recognized because they do not fit the accepted models of youth ministry. With only a

few people making recommendations of churches to study, any prejudices or partiality on

the part of those doing the recommending would have a larger impact on the outcome of

the study than if many people had made recommendations. This potential impact was

offset somewhat by the fact that many people had the opportunity to make

recommendations, and their lack of churches to recommend became part of the findings

of the study. This potential impact was also offset somewhat by the fact that there were

over 20 churches on the list of potential churches to study, and this list was refined by a

preliminary interview with each one of them.

Another limitation was the "sensitivity and integrity of the investigator." This

comes, as Merriam notes, from the fact that in case study research "the researcher is the

primary instrument of data collection and analysis." As Merriam further explains, "Both

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[29] Rich Grassel, telephone interview by the author, May 21, 2003.

the readers of case studies and the authors themselves need to be aware of biases that can

affect the final product."[30]

In an essay for the American Educational Research Association, Royce Sadler

grouped all potential sources of human bias under three main headings: ethical

compromises, value inertias, and cognitive limitations. While the first heading, ethical

compromises, indicates something that is morally reprehensible, the second heading,

values inertia, indicates things that are natural characteristics of people as people. People

see things from the perspective of their own background knowledge, prior experience,

emotional make-up, and world view.[31] Under the third heading, cognitive limitations,

Sadler identified 13 human information processing limitations. His purpose for listing

these sources of bias was to raise awareness, with the belief that understanding the nature

of human bias could lead to better evaluations.[32] Being aware and knowing to be careful

is part of the solution.

Eisenhardt notes that a researcher needs to compensate for the fact that people are

poor processors of information. As people, researchers have a tendency to jump to

conclusions, to be overly influenced by certain people or things, to ignore things that are

basic, and to drop disconfirming evidence.[33] To help compensate for these tendencies,

this study used triangulation of data collection methods, divergent ways of analyzing the

data, and member checks. Merriam describes member checks as "taking data and

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[30] Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 42.

[31] D. Royce Sadler, "Intuitive Data Processing as a Potential Source of Bias in Naturalistic Evaluations," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 3(4), 25-31, 1981; reprinted in Huberman and Miles, *The Qualitative Researcher's Companion*, 124-125.

[32] Ibid., 126-133.

[33] Eisenhardt, "Building Theories From Case Study Research," 18.

tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking

them if the results are plausible."[34]

Another major limitation comes from the general inability to measure spiritual

growth directly. We can only measure what we observe. Yet what we observe in the

present may not correspond with the real spiritual growth within the person. The true

outcome of youth ministry is not seen until years later, when we can see what kind of

adults the youth have turned out to be. DeVries comments that it takes at least ten years

to know how successful a youth ministry has been. In his own ten-year study of the fruit

of his previous youth ministry position, he found the following (italics are his): *"How*

often they attended youth events (including Sunday school and discipleship groups) was

not a good predictor of which teens would and which would not grow toward Christian

adulthood."[35] Any study which is not a longitudinal study risks measuring apparent

growth which turns out not to have been real. This also indicates that a longitudinal

study of youth growing up in small suburban churches might be a fruitful field for further

research.

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[34] Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 204.

[35] Mark DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 63.

CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

Since this was a multiple case study, this chapter presents the findings for each

individual case. Each section begins with a summary description of the case; then

addresses each research question from the perspective of that specific case. After

presenting the findings of each case individually, the chapter concludes with a summary

of the findings across all of the cases.

Crossroads Community Church

Crossroads Community Church is a relatively new congregation in the

Presbyterian Church in America. The first worship service was held November 15, 1998.

The church's vision is: to glorify God by reaching the lost and discipling the found. The

church's target ministry area is the Fishers/Geist areas of suburban Indianapolis, Indiana.

The church currently meets for worship at Fall Creek Intermediate School.[1] On

December 5, 2004 the congregation broke ground for its first building.[2]

According to Christi Wolf, president of the Fishers Chamber of Commerce,

Fishers is the incorporated community and Geist is the unincorporated surrounding area.

Information on the Fishers Chamber of Commerce website would include the Geist area.[3]

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[1] Crossroads Community Church web site, http://crossroadspca.org/history.htm (accessed November 11, 2004).

[2] Keith Doane, telephone interview by the author, November 19, 2004.

[3] Christi Wolf, telephone interview by the author, November 19, 2004.

The Fishers Chamber of Commerce web site describes the community this way:

Fishers is a growing community with a strong history of family values and successful businesses. Located in Southeastern Hamilton County, Fishers has 3 exits off of I-69 just 15 miles northeast of Indianapolis. The transportation routes of I-465 and I-69 make Fishers a very convenient place to live and do business.[4]

The Fishers Chamber of Commerce lists a total Census 2003 population of 52,390. Of that total population, 17,914 are 19 years old or younger.[5] So 34 percent of the population is 19 years old or younger. That is an important figure to remember in terms of the development of the youth ministry at Crossroads.

The church hired Keith Doane as a full-time youth pastor when there were only a handful of youth in the church. The average Sunday morning worship attendance when Doane arrived was about 150 people.[6]

One of the elders, Gene Olivetti, explained that the church had been committed to a team concept of ministry from the very beginning. They wanted to have a staff team rather than a solo pastor. At first they brought in a part-time worship leader. The worship leader was there for a couple of years, but ultimately, according to Olivetti, that was not the best staff choice. "In hindsight, probably we [the governing Board] would've searched quicker for someone who could play the role of youth."[7]

People had to be convinced to hire a full-time youth leader at this point in the church's development. Senior pastor Scott Dean explained the rationale.

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[4] Fishers Chamber of Commerce web site, http://www.fisherschamber.com/community/index.asp (accessed November 19, 2004).

[5] Fishers Chamber of Commerce, "Our Community Demographics," web site, http://www.fisherschamber.com/community/demographics.asp. (accessed November 19, 2004).

[6] Keith Doane, telephone interview by author, November 29, 2004.

[7] Gene Olivetti, interview by author, tape recording, Fishers, IN, September 3, 2003.

So I think there was some persuading that had to be done. I met with several people who kind of just said, "Aren't there other areas that we could, that need to be staffed before youth, you know, worship?" . . . . People were like "shouldn't we staff in that area of worship first, or a true Associate Pastor, or an administrator, which we desperately need, too?" And I just said, "Back to the demographic."[8]

At first, even the leadership was not thinking about a full-time youth leader. Dean described how they were thinking about it at first. "We really thought–speaking of young churches and how you do youth ministry–we thought, 'Hey, we can't do. . .we can't bite off the whole thing, but we want to do something.'"[9]

Olivetti agreed that from both a monetary standpoint and from a work load standpoint, the church could not see the position as being a full-time position. So after exploring the options, they contacted Young Life about doing a partnership in which the youth leader would work part time for the church and part time for Young Life.[10] According to Dean, "I contacted [Young Life]. And they were cautious, hesitant from the very beginning." The area Young Life committee was not very impressed with the history of how those cooperative agreements had worked. The problem was that the churches and Young Life tended to fight over who got what piece of the youth leader's time.[11]

Olivetti summarized what happened next. The church proceeded with contacting Keith Doane to come as a part-time youth worker through a Young Life cooperative agreement. Everything was moving in that direction when the partnership with Young Life fell apart at the last minute. "Hindsight is always 20/20, but looking back on it, that

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[8] Scott Dean, interview by author, tape recording, Fishers, IN, September 3. 2003.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Olivetti interview, September 3, 2003

[11] Dean interview, September 3, 2003.

was probably the best thing that could happen. But we were really thinking in terms of a part-time youth person."[12]

This led to a tough decision that the leadership needed to make. Dean described how they proceeded.

> So when that started to fall through, like Gene said, we said, "Okay, it's either all or nothing." And we were very impressed with Keith—I, at that time, and the elders can tell you—I felt this was really a step out in faith strategically for us, that if we were going to be ahead of the curve in ministry, we needed to step way out on a limb. And like I said, I had to meet with several people, you know, prominent people in the church who said, "I wonder whether this is not a mistake." And I said, "You've got to trust us that this will pay off and bring some energy and vitality." At that time we had a lot of young children, so Keith would have had to wait several years for a lot of the kids to come up into youth.[13]

Dean talked about the barriers a church faces as it seeks to grow. On the one hand, growth is God's responsibility. But on the other hand, the congregation also has a responsibility.

> God brings the increase and we just trust Him for that. But how can we strategize from the church's standpoint to break through those barriers? And I think that means being creative, being willing to step out in faith, being willing to take risks, and I think we haven't done that every time, but we tried to in this area. We staffed way ahead of the growth—we only had 5 to 10 youth, [that is] children who were coming up into being youth.[14]

When Keith Doane arrived at Crossroads as the youth pastor, there was not much of a youth ministry upon which to build.

> When we came here, there were maybe one or two high school students, maybe a handful of junior high, so it was interesting because, you know. . .I was brought here to be the youth pastor and we didn't really have any youth. So it was kind of a unique situation. And, you know, in a sense it was a good situation because

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[12] Olivetti interview.

[13] Dean interview.

[14] Ibid.

when you're in that kind of circumstances, you know that in order for this ministry to grow, it's going to—God is going to have to do something.[15]

From Doane's perspective, God did do something.

We'd been here about a month and we had a barbeque at our house for any high school student, and we didn't know if anyone was going to show up–and one girl, one of the girls that went to our church did show up and she brought two of her friends with her. They were both incoming freshmen that fall. . . . Their families started to come to church within a couple of weeks and now both of those families are members of the church. And they. . .had siblings who were in junior high. . .by the time fall started. . .we had a handful of senior high and a handful of junior high students. Those students really just started inviting their friends and it was amazing to watch how God moved quickly in that circle of friends, and He really built the ministry.[16]

From the perspective of the mother of one of the two girls who was invited to that first barbeque, the secret to the rapid growth was the personal relationship that the youth pastor's wife, Susan, built with the girls even before there was a youth group.

A youth group that was established actually was what I was looking for. And Susan and Keith came, and Susan came and got [my daughter] and her friend and invited her to go shopping. That hooked her right there, I guess. So they went shopping, and then it was the next week they had something at their home, and I couldn't get them to go anywhere else, I'm sure.[17]

At the beginning of the school year 2003-2004, the daughter described the kind of people who were attracted to the senior high youth group.

Well, a lot of people are sophomores or mainly like the group of friends I hang out with at school, and they all just really enjoy coming and just like, I don't know, people a lot like me, I guess.[18]

So the people who were attracted to the youth group were her friends; the three initial girls in the youth group invited their friends. But what made the group attractive to

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[15] Keith Doane, interview by author, tape recording, Fishers, IN, September 3, 2003.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Mother of youth group student, interview by author, Fishers, IN, September 3, 2003.

[18] Youth group student, interview by author, Fishers, IN, September 3, 2003.

them so that they wanted to invite their friends? Besides their relationship with the youth pastor's wife, the student mentioned the way in which the church worked to make things understandable: "Before [at other churches], I didn't have any idea what was going on." She also agreed when her mother commented about the openness and approachability of the congregation. She specifically commented on how much she liked Scott, the senior pastor, referring to him by his first name.[19]

That is a brief summary of the case. We turn our attention now to the findings with regard to the research questions as answered from the perspective of this case.

What assets did Crossroads have that contributed to the spiritual growth of the youth in the church and in the community?

1. A senior pastor with a vision for reaching kids.

Scott Dean worked with youth for eight years prior to coming to Crossroads. When becoming a church planter, he realized, "I'm not called to work with youth anymore." Yet he still loved teens, and he had a vision to see youth ministry develop in the new church he was planting.[20] Keith Doane ascribed to Dean "an innate sense of appreciation for youth ministry." That is seen is through the way Dean seeks out students after the church service. "He's the first person when a student visits church on Sunday morning . . . makes a beeline for them and introduces himself to them. . . . Kids feel very comfortable around him." Doane also feels comfortable around Dean. Doane has found

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Dean interview.

Dean approachable when there are issues or questions, yet Dean has given Doane

freedom to develop the ministry in his own way.[21]

2. Lay leadership of the church with a vision for reaching youth.

Dean made the point that this is an asset for Crossroads, and then he turned to

elder Gene Olivetti as an example.

> I so much appreciate Gene. Gene's kids are raised. They are on their own now.
> Gene could've said, "Hey, this doesn't benefit my family, so let's staff in some
> other area." But I think Gene, you know, Gene understood, he looked at the
> community and he looked at the church and realized, "Hey, this is the best thing
> for the church, even though it doesn't personally benefit me." And that takes a lot
> of sacrifice, to be able to say that.[22]

3. A willingness to fund youth ministry.

Dean spoke about the willingness of the leadership to communicate to the

congregation the need to fund youth ministry.[23] Olivetti explained further.

> At some point to be willing to risk knowing that there will be some people who
> will wish that you were spending your money somewhere else. You know,
> people fight, people argue in the church about money all the time, particularly
> when there's not a lot of it. And we didn't have a lot of it early on. So it was a
> risk. We didn't have all the money in hand. It was a stretch for us. But I think
> we just felt like God was in this.[24]

4. A Supportive Congregation.

From a youth pastor's perspective, Doane saw this as the biggest strength.

"There's a strong sense of community. . .it's a fun place to be. And I think kids respond

to that." New students, who are not part of the church, feel welcomed when they visit.[25]

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[21] Doane interview.

[22] Dean interview.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Olivetti interview.

[25] Doane interview.

Olivetti expressed the way he, as an elder, wants to see the adults respond to youth. "One

of the things I have a passion about is for adults to really know the youth, and that's a

challenge."[26] Part of that passion grew out of his experience as an elder in another small

church, where a teenage girl complained that no one else in the church talked to her by

name.

> You talk about kids being integrated into the church, a part of the church, not just
> on the fringe. I think that's so critical, that the adults, the other adults, not just the
> parents, know them and take an active part. But you know, I always remember
> that. It kind of hurt me that the other adults, not that they didn't care about them,
> but didn't even know who they were. And that was not a big church.[27]

Dean explained that this incident served for him as an example of a small church

not taking advantage of the fact that it was small. "You know, in other words, the

intimacy, the fellowship, the closeness, the family-feel. . . . If the youth don't feel that. . .

that's a real tragedy."[28]

5. *A fairly young congregation with a heart for kids.*

Olivetti mentioned the fact that Crossroads has lots of parents who have a heart

for kids, and lots of people who don't have kids yet who are willing to help.[29] On the

other hand, Doane was concerned that, because it was a young congregation, life issues

and life change issues made recruiting and retention of committed volunteers difficult.[30]

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[26] Olivetti interview.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Dean interview.

[29] Olivetti interview.

[30] Doane, telephone interview, November 19, 2004.

How did Crossroads identify these assets and evaluate their potential contribution?

1. Thinking strategically about the future.

Olivetti explained this as not waiting until the need is there in the present, but looking strategically into the future. That means not waiting until there are enough youth to hire a youth director.[31] It was demonstrated by Dean in pointing people to the community around them. As he is quoted earlier as saying, "Back to the demographic."[32] Doane noted that churches usually wait until they have youth before they consider calling a youth pastor. "Scott's vision was different, was let's hire a youth pastor in order to build the ministry, not as a response to an existing need."[33]

2. The elders having a good sense of the pulse of the congregation.

Dean saw this as coming from two sources: the elders meeting regularly while developing an open and honest relationship with each other, and regularly asking people in the congregation what they were thinking.[34]

How did the leadership of Crossroads mobilize the congregation in order to implement these assets and enable the youth to grow spiritually?

1. Making sure everyone understood the priorities.

Olivetti expressed it like this.

There are only so many resources, there's lots of good you can do, but just like you've got to choose your battles, you've got to choose those things that you're

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[31] Olivetti interview.

[32] Dean interview.

[33] Doane, interview, September 3, 2003.

[34] Dean interview.

going to use your resources for. . . . That's also a challenge for us, to keep the vision in front of people, and the Vision Banquet is always one venue.[35]

He explained that the elders had developed an annual vision banquet as a way to communicate the yearly priorities clearly to the people. They have found this to be a better environment than a congregational meeting to communicate vision. After a nice catered dinner, where everyone has a good time, the leaders present the vision for the coming year, emphasizing the high-priority items. They give the people a visual reminder–a magnet–to take home with them to keep the vision before them for the coming year.

2. Keeping the youth ministry in front of people.

Pastor Dean finds ways to have the youth pastor participate in the worship service. Even when Keith Doane was brand new at the church, the elders gave him a key presentation to make in the Vision Banquet. They have found ways to give the youth exposure–in worship services, bulletins, and newsletters. Also, there are times when the leaders will say to the congregation, "Let's pray for youth."[36]

3. Understanding the importance of implementation, and helping people see results.

Dean made the point that anyone can have a vision. It is easy to say that you want the church to grow to such and such a size, or to have this or that ministry. "I think the question of vision is not so much do you know where you are going, but are we seeing you get us there? Everyone can dream . . . I think people want to see results."[37]

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[35] Olivetti interview.

[36] Dean interview.

[37] Ibid.

The people saw results in terms of the growth in the youth ministry. The youth ministry went from one girl and two of her friends at that first meeting to a core of 20 students in about six months.[38] Now the average attendance at junior high meetings is 15-18 students, and the average attendance at high school meetings is around 12 students. The total number of students who come on a somewhat regular basis is even greater.[39] Not only are people seeing the results in terms of numbers in the youth groups, they are also seeing the youth involved in the church. Doane stated, "It is a goal of mine to not segregate the youth ministry; I want our kids to participate." He listed ways in which they participate, on Sunday mornings, in special ministries like Vacation Bible School, and in service projects.[40]

The congregation has also grown during the time that Doane has been there. When he came, the average Sunday morning worship attendance was around 150 people; now it is around 200. That does not necessarily indicate any kind of cause and effect, but the congregation would surely interpret it as the overall ministry advancing, seeing results.[41]

4. *Understanding the balance between God's sovereignty and human responsibility.*

One piece of advice that Doane would give to a new youth pastor coming into a situation like his is this:

> Realize that you are not building this ministry. Realize that whatever happens, it's not yours and where that means, you know, you come and you have a

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[38] Doane, interview, September 3, 2003.

[39] Doane, telephone interview, November 19, 2004.

[40] Doane, interview, September 3, 2003.

[41] Doane, telephone interview by author, November 29, 2003.

thousand kids following you, or you've been there for two years and you have one kid in your ministry, whatever the case may be, it's not your ministry. If God's called you, then you're to follow that call and take every opportunity that He gives you, whether those are a lot of opportunities or a very few opportunities.[42]

Doane could point to God building his ministry at Crossroads through bringing a catalyst who invited other catalysts, students who were good at inviting others. But Doane also articulated a strategy for identifying those catalysts, working with them and encouraging them to grow in their relationship with Christ.[43] So there was a balance between God's sovereignty and human responsibility.

Sharp Street United Methodist Church

From the youngest church in this study we now shift to the oldest church in the study. Sharp Street United Methodist Church is the oldest African-American congregation in Montgomery County, Maryland. A welcome flyer, which the ushers gave me during my visit to the church in June 2004, gives this description of the church's history:

> Sharp Street Methodist Episcopal Church was formed in 1822 in Sandy Spring, Md. Quaker settlers were instrumental in Sharp Street's beginning when they freed their slaves after the Revolutionary War. Sharp Street is the oldest black church in Montgomery County. The church was named for Sharp Street Methodist Church in Baltimore that was established in 1802. It was in 1968 that United Methodism began and Sharp Street became Sharp Street United Methodist Church.[44]

Sharp Street is located in Sandy Spring, Maryland. Sandy Spring is a small community located between the larger suburbs of Olney and Ashton, a little over 16 miles north of Washington, DC. The population of Ashton-Sandy Spring in the year

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[42] Doane, interview, September 3, 2003.

[43] Ibid.

[44] "Welcome to Sharp Street United Methodist Church," flyer, undated.

2000 was 3,437 people.[45] According to the Olney Chamber of Commerce, the population

of neighboring Olney is over 30,000 residents. The Olney Chamber of Commerce web

site gives this description of the overall community:

> Now, Olney is the last suburban outpost in upper northeast Montgomery County, Maryland, with many residents working as far away as Washington, D.C., Baltimore, and even Northern Virginia. Traffic fills the roads that were originally carved for farmers to haul produce to market. Yet Olney is successful in maintaining much of its old-time character while growing into a modern community.[46]

Karen Clark, who has worked with youth at Sharp Street for 14 or 15 years,

attributes the development of the current youth ministry to the arrival of Pastor George

Hackey, who was willing to change things, and who chose his friends Johnnie and

Seaquett Williams to be youth leaders.

> Basically, over the years we have always had a youth group but nothing of this magnitude. . . . We really didn't have a lot of activities that we involved our youth in, we didn't have a youth Sunday or anything like that. You know we just had a youth group on a small scale. And I guess since Pastor Hackey has come to this church and started changing some things, then along with Seaquett and Johnnie Williams, and we have really, really grown.[47]

Pastor George Hackey was in his eighth year at Sharp Street at the conclusion of

this study. His background, prior to his call to ministry, was in community relations with

the Montgomery County Police Department. While serving as a police officer, he helped

start a program for youth in his neighborhood called the We Care program.

> My thing was the fact that every youth, every child is important, and every child is special, every child is worth putting the input and energy into assuring that they

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[45] Ashton-Sandy Spring, Maryland, web site, http://www.city-data.com/housing/houses-Ashton-Sandy Spring-Maryland.html., (accessed November 24, 2004).

[46] Olney, Maryland, Chamber of Commerce, web site, http://www.olneymd.org/#, (accessed November 24, 2004).

[47] Karen Clark, interview by author, tape recording, Sandy Spring, MD, October 17, 2004.

would have a great life . . . and the fact that we could go back and think about times in our youth that somebody was always there to help us.[48]

Hackey said that he intentionally targeted youth in his ministry "because that's my heart." He went on to attribute his heart for youth to the example of his mother.

> At one time she had her own nursery school when she was younger, and I used to go and help her with the little kids. And then she's a teacher, she's been a teacher forever, and she's retired, she's 75 now, but she still substitutes because she still loves it, you know, she loves it. And that's where I got it from, I'm sure. So, you know, youth, they're my heart.[49]

One of the first things Hackey did to begin attracting and ministering to youth was to start an every-second-Sunday "youth-led, dress-down, bring-a-friend Sunday." Getting the youth involved in leading the service was an important aspect of these youth Sundays. "The youth were in charge, they would be liturgists, the ushers, they would say the prayer, and they would lead the service completely, except the sermon." Dressing down was another important aspect of these youth Sundays, intended to take away a barrier to youth coming to the service. "Get them in church and then, you know, allow the Holy Spirit to work with their spirits and working together as the body of Christ."[50]

Another thing Hackey did to minister to youth was to work with the local high school, Sherwood High School, to develop a program to minister to middle and high school students who had been suspended from school. They took the idea from a ministry in Newport News, Virginia. The SHARP program (an acronym for: Sharp Street Hosts an Academic Resource Program) was designed to help students make up academic work while out of school on suspension, but also to mentor kids to help them

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[48] George Hackey, interview by author, tape recording, Sandy Spring, MD, November 20, 2003.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

take responsibility for their own behavior and to work on the underlying causes of the behavior that led them to get suspended. The Sharp Street suspension program has now become a model for other programs in Montgomery County.[51]

Probably the most significant thing that Hackey did to develop the youth ministry was to choose his friends, Johnnie and Seaquett Williams, to be the volunteer youth leaders. The Hackey family and the Williams family had known each other for about 25 years, had gone on trips together, and the wives had worked together.[52] But at first, the Williams family did not attend Sharp Street. They felt they lived too far away. But the Williams' son, Jerome, became an NBA basketball player. With the income from playing in the NBA, one of the things Jerome wanted to do was to buy his parents a new house. The house Jerome bought them was, according to Seaquett, only five minutes from Sharp Street. "We had no idea we'd be this close. So quite naturally where else are we going to go? So that's how we ended up here."[53]

Johnnie and Seaquett Williams brought with them a love for youth that was as strong as Hackey's own. Seaquett explained:

> And in terms of our background, basically we were just two parents who always did things in the community, who always had groups, you know, and rallying kids and we always had a van and we always had the neighborhood house.[54]

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[51] Hackey interview; and Johnnie and Seaquett Williams, interview by author, tape recording, Sandy Spring, MD, October 23, 2003.

[52] Hackey interview.

[53] Williams interview.

[54] Ibid.

Johnnie amplified, "Our house was the community recreation center." Then Seaquett explained that through always having kids in their house, they became "the neighborhood counselors" to those kids.[55]

As I was studying Sharp Street, Johnnie and Seaquett had been the youth leaders for around four years. At first there were only 8 middle and high school students. Now they are regularly averaging 26 or more students for youth activities. For special events they have sometimes gotten 35. There is a core of 20-22 students who are there for almost every session.[56] According to Hackey, the church's average Sunday morning attendance is 125–130 people. Of that total, he estimates that on a typical Sunday, probably a fifth, or 20 percent, of the congregation is youth in middle and high school.[57]

Johnnie and Seaquett Williams developed the ministry by first making contact with all the children in the church, and all the parents of children, collecting information and letting them know that they planned to start a more active youth ministry. Then they had an initial meeting and began listening to the kids. Johnnie explained that at this point they were not sure how they wanted to proceed. They had lots of ideas of things they wanted to do, but first they wanted to listen to the kids, get their input, find out where they were and what they wanted. Seaquett described how it developed from there:

> Listening and allowing them to talk. And that went on for several months. And we met and then we decided to elect officers, and from that, you know, we developed . . . what are the officers going to do and what would you like to do? Then we went from there to meeting with the officers once a month.[58]

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[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Hackey interview.

[58] Williams interview.

The meeting with the officers was in addition to general meetings of the whole group. They also talked to the kids and questioned them about their understanding of what a Christian is supposed to do. Seaquett described these discussions.

> What is it that you're expected to do as a Christian? You know, okay, we can go to amusement parks all day, but what are we going to do when we get there, you know, how will we act? How do we respond to things that people do, things against us? How do we respond when someone approaches you to, you know, to engage you in a fight? Those are the kinds of things that we talked to them about, and really got a feel for what they—who they are.[59]

Chris Grey is a college-age man who grew up in the church, became president of the Christian Soldiers (the name the group has adopted), then became a junior leader, and has now become one of the adult leaders of the youth group. He explained a key philosophy of the ministry, which is to get students involved in the ministries of the church.

> We wanted the youth to get involved in the church, not just by being in the church, but by being involved in the church service so that they will learn. Mr. Johnnie and Mrs. Seaquett always said the youth are the future of the church and it's best if they start their involvement while they are young. So as they continue to get older they are grounded in their faith.[60]

The church has youth group activities in which the youth are together with their peers. But Sharp Street also seeks to get all the kids involved in the church. Johnnie and Seaquett encourage each youth to be involved in a least one ministry of the church. Johnnie and Seaguett also mentioned two motivational pieces that they have for getting the youth involved. One is a vacation to the Massanutten resort in Virginia. Johnnie and Seaquett own a timeshare condominium there, and they take all the Christian Soldiers who earn enough points on a vacation to Massanutten. The youth earn points by their

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[59] Ibid.

[60] Chris Grey, interview by author, tape recording, Sandy Spring, MD, October 17, 2004.

involvement. The other motivational piece is food. The youth leaders feed the kids. But

as they explain, the ultimate goal is to see the food move from being an external means of

motivation "and it turns into fellowship, that's when you know you're doing the right

thing, and they're getting it."[61]

Having summarized the case, we now turn our attention to how this case

addresses our research questions.

What assets did Sharp Street have that contributed to the spiritual growth of the youth in the church and in the community?

1. A senior pastor with a vision for reaching kids.

Johnnie Williams spoke about the way Pastor Hackey relates to kids, not only the

youth, but even the little kids, finding ways to incorporate even younger kids into the

worship service. Hackey encourages the whole family to come to church, and to not

leave the children at home just because they squirm or cry.[62] Youth leader Howard Clark

spoke about how, whatever the youth leaders are doing with youth, Pastor Hackey

supports it.[63] Pastor Hackey emphasized that one of the first things he did as pastor, in

his first year at the church, was to start a once a month youth Sunday.[64]

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[61] Williams interview.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Howard Clark, interview by author, tape recording, Sandy Spring, MD, October 17, 2004.

[64] Hackey interview.

2. A supportive congregation.

Hackey expressed it strongly: "I think the major strength is that this church cares about our youth. I mean they [the youth] know it!"[65] Johnnie Williams said, "I think the assets [of this church] are in the people."[66]

One way through which the members of the congregation demonstrate their support is how they talk to the youth. Chris Grey, who grew up in the church and who is now a volunteer leader, put it this way.

> They [the congregation] really encourage us; they give us help, even if it's just comments like: "You did well in the church service today. You were a good liturgist." Just the encouragement they give us, the kids love to hear that because some of them only hear bad things or only have bad things pointed out. But compliments that we get from the members of the church are always good.[67]

Another way the members of the congregation demonstrate their support is through giving tangible resources. Hackey described this.

> One thing about this congregation, they are a giving congregation. If you ask them, especially if the kids ask, all a kid's gotta do is just ask—and especially finances—they'll get it. I don't care what it is, they'll get it.[68]

Chris Grey spoke about a particular retreat to Ocean City, Maryland. Food was not provided for that retreat, but members of the congregation provided the group with everything they needed.[69] Karen Clark added that they were even "able to go out to a nice restaurant, so we were able to get a really nice meal as well."[70]

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[65] Hackey interview.

[66] Williams interview.

[67] Grey interview.

[68] Hackey interview.

[69] Grey interview.

[70] Karen Clark interview.

3. Uniquely qualified youth leaders.

The main youth leaders, Johnnie and Seaquett Williams, were uniquely qualified in that they were parents of an NBA basketball player. Hackey talked about how that provided a resource person who could come in and talk to the youth; "Youth love professional athletes . . . well we all do, so that really helped."[71] That also provided resources that a small church does not always have, such as a big house where youth could be entertained, or a timeshare at a resort where youth could vacation together.[72] But just because people have those kinds of resources does not guarantee that they will invest those resources in youth. The important thing about Johnnie and Seaquett is that they were investing resources in kids even before their son made it to the NBA.

Another thing that made Johnnie and Seaquett Williams uniquely qualified is that they were growing spiritually themselves. When asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the ministry, the first thing Johnnie said was:

> I would evaluate it just by my life. I've grown spiritually myself as far as being involved with the Bible study, adult Bible study and Bible study retreats. I took another step and became a lay speaker, a liturgist, just ever stepping a little bit closer. So just from my personal spiritual growth, the church has been tremendous to me in terms of my spiritual growth.[73]

Seaquett spoke about her understanding of the need to set a good example.

> You really have to walk the walk when you're walking with, when you have kids under your care. You have to understand that the impressions that you make upon them are lasting and really affect how they see their spiritual future in terms of what they can believe in. We're kind of examples, and if you're good examples, then hopefully they'll have good, healthy, spiritual development in [their] lives.[74]

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[71] Hackey interview.

[72] Williams interview.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

4. A plan for developing youth leadership.

Seaquett said that one of their goals is to show the youth that "Christianity is not boring, it's exciting." But then she explained that she was not talking about all fun and games. "It's exciting when you understand your purpose and the gifts that God has afforded you, and what you can do with them." The Williams' have a plan for developing the youth as leaders in the church. That not only means giving the teens leadership roles, but also training them through such means as a "liturgist in training" program.[75]

5. A loving congregation with a love for the community.

The congregation is a loving community. Howard Clark lists one of the assets as: "the fellowship, the camaraderie; this is a loving church where everybody is like family."[76] But that love is not all focused internally. Seaquett Williams speaks of "the love that church has just for family and community." Then she explains that it is a sense of family that "reaches out into the community." Then she gave examples such as the outreach to senior citizens in the community.[77] Hackey stated his understanding of the church's responsibility: "The church has to reach out to the community, the community doesn't have to reach out to the church."[78]

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[75] Ibid.

[76] Clark interview.

[77] Williams interview.

[78] Hackey interview.

How did Sharp Street identify these assets and evaluation their potential contribution?

1. *Assessing the needs of the community, and the strengths of the church.*

In talking about some of the changes he has introduced, Hackey explained that "you have to assess what the needs of the community" are, and you have to "find out who you are as a church." As you do this, you have to assess "what type of interaction you have with the community." This kind of assessment then leads you in designing activities and programs.[79] So Sharp Street engaged in assessment to identify the strengths it had to minister to the needs of the community.

2. *Picking up ideas from other churches and evaluating how they could be used at Sharp Street.*

Hackey has actively studied what other churches are doing and has evaluated whether those ideas would work at Sharp Street. That has allowed him to explore other assets he could bring to the church, as well as helped him understand his own church better.

> Every church I even go to, I always look at what they are doing, what are they doing for kids, and see if I can bring it back . . . the thing is always look for other church's programs and activities, and then see if it's going to be compatible or viable, if it's going to be a viable asset for your own church. And I always do that, I always look for that.[80]

I might add that this is one way in which this best practice study can help others. Hopefully, reading about what these exemplary churches are doing to develop their assets, other churches will identify or develop similar assets in their own situations.

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[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid.

3. Listening to people.

I have already quoted Johnnie and Seaquett Williams about how they began the development of the ministry by listening to the youth (see the case summary above). Hackey expressed as a general principle of his ministry: "I think one of the main things that any church can do is listen to you." Not only did he listen to the congregation in general, and the youth in particular, he also talked about "getting in contact with the community . . . [and] with the school system."[81] Listening helps identify both the assets you have, and the needs you can potentially meet.

How did the leadership of Sharp Street mobilize the congregation in order to implement these assets and enable the youth to grow spiritually?

1. Creating an environment that supports trying new things.

Hackey said that there's one thing he always tells the congregation: "I always tell them change is good, change is good, you know, just try it and if you don't like it, that's fine, too." A word he used multiple times during the interview was "flexible." He tells the congregation that they have to "be flexible." By consistently communicating this message, and by consistently trying new things, he has convinced the congregation that "I know this man's going to try, and if it doesn't work, fine." Part of creating this environment has been a willingness to risk some opposition from some of the members of the congregation as he has tried new things. He said that there was some opposition at first to instituting the "youth-led, dress-down, bring-a-friend Sunday." But he was willing to try it anyway, and see the result.[82]

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[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid.

2. *Listening.*

In talking about change, Hackey reinforced the importance of listening. "Be open- minded, willing to listen. And that's in fact not just to youth, but to anybody–to anybody."[83] It is reasonable to suspect that Hackey's willingness to listen helped produce the environment that is open to trying new things.

3. *Putting the right people in the right places.*

Hackey stated that "it's all about, I think, putting the right people in the right place." He had a strong idea about the kind of person he wanted to work with the youth.

> What a pastor needs to look at, I think, as far as when it comes to youth, is first of all a couple is always more ideal, a husband and wife, with experience as far as youth, but they have to have a passion for youth. You know, that's a spiritual gift. They have to have a passion for youth. And if you find a couple with a passion for youth, who are growing spiritually themselves. . .that's important.[84]

Later he returned to the same theme: "When you get passionate people and you get people in the right places, it's going to affect the youth." An added benefit with Johnnie and Seaquett as youth leaders was their having the pro athlete son, and another son who is a motivational speaker. "It was such an easy task to choose Johnnie and Seaquett as leaders of the youth, and they've been great." Hackey also spoke of the impact that Johnnie and Seaquett have on everybody, and that parents go to them for help.[85]

Hackey has also recognized the gifts and talents of others, and how others who are not youth leaders can still contribute to the youth ministry. One example is a lady in

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[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid.

the church who is a grant writer. "If there's a grant out there and she finds it, we're going to get it."[86] Karen Clark gave an example of a grant that this grant writer got that benefited the youth. The purpose was to develop a Mind, Body, Soul, and Spirit program. It was a grant for a health program, and Seaquett got the youth involved on Tuesdays and Thursdays for six weeks. They also had bike riding on Saturdays.[87] And according to Howard Clark, the grant even allowed the church to purchase 25 bikes for the youth.[88]

4. Placing a priority on congregational ownership.

A key word used by Johnnie and Seaquett Williams was "ownership." They worked on getting ownership from the kids. They also worked on getting the congregation to take "ownership," to take responsibility for ministering to the kids.

> We're telling the congregation that we're all responsible for these kids, and I can see that happening, too. . . . Taking ownership. So these are all our kids, we all have to raise them, not just me.[89]

5. Seeing results.

Chris Grey says the congregation has seen the results in terms of a greater number of youth in the congregation.[90] Howard Clark stated that youth have added to the worship service through their participation.[91] Seaquett Williams observed that "people in the congregation come up to us constantly and say, 'I can see growth in this young

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[86] Ibid.

[87] Karen Clark interview.

[88] Howard Clark interview.

[89] Williams interview.

[90] Grey interview.

[91] Howard Clark interview.

person.'" That is good, because at first, some of the members of the congregation were not too sure about some of the youth who were coming to the church without their parents. But seeing the result has helped lead members of the church to take responsibility.[92] Howard Clark said that, "basically, our main purpose [is] to get them saved." But he has seen that some of these youth have gone back home and invited their parents, then "their parents start coming, and some parents get saved."[93] Hackey's vision is not only "to get them saved," but to see them develop into leaders. Hackey said that not everyone is an up-front kind of leader, so he seeks to develop not only leaders, but also followers with leadership abilities.[94] Seeing results has done much to mobilize the congregation to implement these assets and to enable the youth to grow spiritually. The results have even touched people outside of the congregation.

Cornerstone Evangelical Presbyterian Church

Cornerstone grew out of a small group of people meeting together for a Bible study who were concerned about the theological direction in which their church was moving. In 1981, twenty people met together to express their intention to form a new church. In 1982, this group became Calvin Presbyterian Church, and they joined the Evangelical Presbyterian denomination. Calvin Presbyterian Church was never very large, and by 1993 it was shrinking in size, with only 58 members.[95]

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[92] Williams interview.

[93] Howard Clark interview.

[94] Hackey interview.

[95] "Cornerstone's History," Cornerstone Evangelical Presbyterian Church, web site, http://www.cornerstoneepc.com/about/history.html, (Accessed May 7, 2004).

Concerned with their survival, the leadership decided to move the church farther out in

the Houston suburbs, to the growing suburb of Katy, Texas. Along with the geographic

move, the church also changed its name to Cornerstone Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

A long-time elder, Gene Cover, who has been at the church for most of its history,

identified that move as a key milestone in the development of the youth ministry.

> Moving the church to Katy would be a milestone even though the youth ministry
> didn't really take off in a big way, but it put us in a position to where there were a
> lot more young people, because before we moved out to Katy, it was over—half
> the congregation was like over 50 years old. . . . The way we were headed, our
> congregation was going to die out if we didn't do something. We were kind of
> invisible. . .we just weren't growing.[96]

According to the Katy Area Chamber of Commerce, while the population of the

city of Katy is only 12,500 people, the population of the surrounding area included in the

Katy Independent School District is 164,000. The area encompasses 181 square miles.

The per capita income in the area is 50 percent above the national average. The eastern

boundary of this school district is 16 miles west of downtown Houston. Katy has access

to Houston via Interstate 10.[97]

A second major milestone in the development of the youth ministry was when the

church called Buck Oliphant as pastor soon after the move to Katy. Oliphant arrived in

early 1994, and one of the first things he did after he arrived was to begin meeting with

the handful of youth who were there. He also began looking to hire a youth director.

I was in youth ministry myself, I was a youth director, then in Young Life, so I really,
and my kids have always been impacted by the churches that we've been

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[96] Gene And Linda Cover, interview by the author, tape recording, Katy, TX, June 6, 2004.

[97] "Facts and Stats," Katy Area Chamber of Commerce, web site,
http://www.katychamber.com/facts_stats.html, (Accessed November 29, 2004).

to, the youth ministry, so when I came, it was a very small church, but they had a lot of money, they had like $200,000 here with 35 members. And I asked them if they were willing to invest this in ministry, and they said, "Yes." I said, "Well, I'd like to spend it starting with a youth director." And I kept my promise, I spent all their money.[98]

The church hired Rob Hock, a recent graduate of Texas A & M University, as youth director in August 1994. Hock served as youth director only until December 1995. During this time, he built the youth group to an average attendance of around 20 students. This did not produce a corresponding growth in the church. Hock summarized that the church saw their financial resources being depleted, and this resulted in his decision to leave.

> They had decided that it was better to spend it [the accumulated surplus of money] trying to do ministry and to build the church as opposed to not spending it. They had the belief that bringing me in would, you know, would result in an influx of families into the church. When it became obvious that that was not happening, they began to look at the reservoirs and they decided, they began looking at whether or not, I guess, I was the guy for the position. At the same time I began realizing that I wasn't the guy for the position.[99]

A concern for Cornerstone during the years from 1993 until 1997 was where to meet for worship.

> From 1993 until 1997, the congregation met for worship in various school gymnasiums. During 1996, Cornerstone completed a contract to buy the facilities and property of a Lutheran church located at 1351 Mason Road. The sales contract allowed the Lutherans to rent the location for about a year while their new facility was being built. Both churches moved into their new facilities during the last two weeks of December 1996. Cornerstone began worshipping in the current facilities during January 1997.[100]

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[98] Buck Oliphant, interview by the author, tape recording, Katy, TX, June 7, 2004.

[99] Rob Hock, interview by the author, tape recording, Olney, MD, June 17, 2004.

[100] "Cornerstone's History."

The church got into its building in January 1997. In November 1997 the

congregation took another huge step in the development of the youth ministry: the

church's governing board formally hired Brian Land as youth pastor. The church had

known about Land's situation for a few months, but in November he and the elders

committed to having Land work with the youth at Cornerstone.[101]

As Land described it, "We came over from the church plant that kind of blew

up."[102] Gene Cover told me what the opportunity looked like from Cornerstone's

perspective.

> Buck came to our congregation and said, "He's [Brian] going to go somewhere
> else, we have an opportunity to bring him here. And if he comes to us, then the
> kids that he's been ministering to . . . can come so that he can continue the
> ministry that he already has in place." I think he [Brian] was torn, I mean he had
> other opportunities at the time but the other opportunities would have taken him
> away from Houston, away from Katy, and he felt pretty attached to those kids.
> He didn't really, he didn't want to leave them, so I think that was what tipped him
> to stay in Katy.[103]

Cover went on to say that he did not regard Brian's coming as a coincidence; it

was a result of the church's looking for what God was doing. "We were looking for what

God is doing around us, and then God dropped Brian in our lap."[104]

Oliphant clarified that the church from which Land had come had closed down.

And when the other church collapsed, many of the kids from that church came with Brian

Land.[105] Land explained that when he first arrived, before he was formally hired,

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[101] Debbi Williams, interview by the author, tape recording, Katy, TX, June 7, 2004.

[102] Brian and Amy Land, interview by the author, tape recording, Katy, TX, June 5, 2004.

[103] Cover interview.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Oliphant interview.

Cornerstone had provided him a place to heal from what he had just experienced at the other church.

> We were unemployed and Buck basically convinced the elders that this is a youth pastor and he needs a place to heal and we need to be a church that comes around and heals, and helps heal this guy. They didn't expect us to be here more than six months. Flat out, they said we want you to come in here and we want to take care of you and whenever you get your feet back underneath you, you go to a church that can support you.[106]

Church secretary Debbi Williams gave a little further perspective on the significance of the church being willing to invest in Brian Land. The church had just taken a huge step of faith in buying a $750,000 facility with only 58 members. The congregation had gone from a significant surplus to a large debt. In addition, they had been disappointed with the results of the people they had hired to do youth ministry. After Rob Hock left, they had employed a couple of different people on a part-time basis.

> I think our elders were just in a state of shock that we had managed to incur all the debt that we did coming from the reserve that we were used to having . . . . I mean they very bravely stepped into it. That would scare a lot of people, but they were brave.[107]

When Land came, there were a handful of youth already at Cornerstone, and then a small group of youth came from the church where Land had been serving. There was a mission trip to Guatemala that had already been planned. Land felt the group of senior high students that had signed up to go was too small, but there was also a group of junior high students, eighth-graders, about 12 – 15 of them. Land made "an executive decision

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[106] Land interview.

[107] Williams interview.

to make it a high school mission trip–but to also make it available to next year's high

schoolers."[108]

Land now sees this trip as a major milestone in the development of the youth

ministry. It meshed the two groups together, the group that had been at Cornerstone and

the group that came to Cornerstone with Land. "That was a major event that really

formed an extraordinarily tight cluster of kids that got mature and kept maturing at a

pretty rapid rate." He was talking specifically about the eighth-grade students who

became the nucleus for the Cornerstone youth ministry's "class of '02 bubble kids," a

class that numbered 150 students by the time they graduated.[109]

A providential opportunity helped this core group of students become very

influential in leading students from their school into the youth group.

> A year later they built a new high school out here, Cinco Ranch High School, and
> 95 percent of our class of '02 bubble kids moved over there as sophomores, and
> so they were the top class for three years at a brand new school. They were now
> essentially seniors for three years, and so they created the culture of that high
> school.[110]

Several of the people I interviewed spoke about how bringing in staff to help

Land was important to the development of the youth ministry. Before hiring additional

staff, Brian spent a lot of time on campus building relationships with kids, but he was

pretty much running the program alone, with some help from volunteers. As Gene Cover

put it, "When Brian came, he was the only guy. As funds permitted, we grew his staff,

but then had to shrink his staff."[111] In 2000, Kirsten, who is now Kirsten Oliphant, was

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[108] Land interview.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Cover interview.

brought in to disciple girls. Then in 2001, Rob Oliphant, the pastor's son, was hired to

work with junior high students. Rob was on staff for two years, and Kirsten for two and a

half years. Now they both volunteer.[112]

Two more milestones for the ministry occurred in 2002. One was the graduation

of the "bubble class of '02." When they graduated, that took 150 students out of the

ministry.[113] The other milestone was the completion of a new building that houses an all-

purpose gymnasium—which the church now uses for worship services—as well as youth

activities, church offices, and an upstairs youth room. Cover explained, "The main

reason that we built that building was to have a place for youth ministry."[114]

The most recent milestone has been the departure of Brian Land. The Land

family has moved to Asheville, North Carolina, were Brian has accepted a new youth

ministry position. Brian's last Sunday at Cornerstone was October 17, 2004.[115] In a

telephone interview from his new office in North Carolina, Land said this about the

move.

> The move was just an issue of timing. They needed some new blood. They
> needed someone who would go back a few steps and go and do more contact
> work; I had been doing more with leadership development. They also, quite
> frankly, needed someone who could take less of a paycheck. The church is broke.
> . . . I'm excited about what the change can mean for this church. . . . The person
> coming in to replace me is not full-time, but he's an incredibly hard worker. And
> when I left, we had our largest volunteer staff ever.[116]

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[112] Rob and Kirsten Oliphant, interview by the author, tape recording, Katy, TX, June 5, 2004.

[113] Land interview.

[114] Cover interview.

[115] "Landfall Projected in North Carolina," *Around the Cornerstone,* newsletter, October 2004.

[116] Brian Land, interview by author, telephone, November 29, 2004.

Let us now see how this case addresses our research questions.

What assets did Cornerstone have that contributed to the spiritual growth of the youth in the church and in the community?

1. A senior pastor with a vision for reaching kids.

When asked about the assets that Cornerstone has for ministry to youth, Rob Hock immediately responded, "I would say the biggest asset would be Buck." Hock attributes some of that to Oliphant's experience with youth, "He's an old Young Life guy, an old youth guy." Then Hock listed some specific ways in which Buck was an asset.

> He was absolutely supportive in basically everything, anything. He was the kind of guy that sort of figures you gotta break windows to build ministries, to build youth ministries, it just goes with the territory. So he gave me a great deal of latitude. He also worked at trying to create an environment where I could fail. And what I mean by that was not that he wanted me to fail, but if I did something and it didn't work, it wasn't a big deal, it was okay, just move on, let's figure out what happened and just move on. His philosophy, and it's just his own personal experiences, if anything's worth doing well, it's worth failing at it the first couple of times. . . . He was an advocate. . .not only for the youth program, but for me personally. . . . I think he modeled well relational ministry. . . . Ministry for him was not a job; it was just a simple reflection of his passion for Christ.[117]

Rob Oliphant, who probably knows Buck Oliphant the best of all the people I interviewed, agrees that Buck has a passion for youth ministry. Rob has seen Buck not only as a pastor, but also as a father.

> The pastor here, who was also a youth director when he was younger, also my father, is a big supporter of youth and realizes that, I mean first of all, that pretty much youth in middle school and high school, that's usually the time in which they become Christians. . .so he's a big believer in supporting youth ministry.[118]

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[117] Hock interview.

[118] Rob and Kristen Oliphant interview.

One of the students who was working as a summer intern at Cornerstone said this about Buck Oliphant: "He's not eloquent with his words, but what he speaks is truth."[119] Everyone I interviewed expressed respect for Oliphant's authenticity and passion for youth.

Cornerstone is facing another significant transition because Oliphant has announced his intention to step down as pastor. Oliphant understands that this could mean a transition for the youth ministry as well, because, as he admits, "I don't know that very many pastors would be as supportive as I have been of [youth ministry]."[120]

2. *A willingness to fund youth ministry.*

An examination of the 2004 approved operating budget for Cornerstone shows that nearly one third of the budget was allocated to youth ministry. Just for comparison, and to understand some of the tension that is now being seen in the church, less than 10 percent of the budget was allocated for all the rest of Christian Education, which includes children's ministries. The total amount allocated to youth ministries, including salaries, was listed as $112,905.26[121]

> Buck Oliphant expressed his philosophy of funding youth ministry.
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> It was just a philosophy that, you know, we want to, if 80 percent of the kids become believers before they're 18, then that's where we want to invest our money. And that was the only thing we had going for us, we believed that great things could happen if we put money into it and hired someone.[122]

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[119] Focus Group with summer interns, interview by author, tape recording, Katy, TX, June 7, 2004.

[120] Buck Oliphant interview.

[121] Column labeled "2004 Approved Budget" in "Cornerstone EPC 2003 Operating Fund Activity," Cornerstone Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Katy, TX, dated May 14, 2004.

[122] Buck Oliphant interview.

When asked how a church that averages around 135 people in attendance on

Sunday mornings could support such a youth ministry, Amy Land (Brian's wife) replied,

"We have a lot of big-time tithers. They give the first-fruits, you know, literally." Brian

agreed, "This church tithes." Yet Brian also recognized that the youth ministry could be

a drain on the resources that the church needs to do other ministries.

> Buck gave them the vision of support and of youth ministry . . . so it's like the
> church has always had a great vision and it's struggling now, because we've
> outweighed the church and we are a substantial drain on all of their resources.
> But the people, 98 percent of them, don't complain whatsoever, because they
> know that what's going on is pretty remarkable.[123]

The move to Katy, along with the development of the youth ministry, has changed

the demographics of the congregation. It is now a younger congregation, and there is a

concern for more resources to be deployed for children's ministries. Long-term youth

ministry volunteer Peter Brownell was concerned about what happened at the last

congregational meeting: "Concerns were raised for funding of different programs, and I

really for the first time felt that the church was having different groups develop." He

talked especially about the young mothers who were concerned about children's

ministries.[124]

3. A vision and a plan for developing youth leadership.

Brian Land has articulated exactly what he wants to see the students become as a

result of being in the youth ministry. He wants them to become "progressive, contagious,

lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ (PCL, [pronounced] pickle)." He further expressed it to

me in terms of what he wants the students to do in the future.

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[123] Brian and Amy Land interview.

[124] Peter Brownell, interview by author, tape recording, Katy, TX, June 8, 2004.

I tell the student leaders this flat out, I say, my goal with you guys, I mean I want them to be progressive and contagious, but I want them to make great elders in the church someday. I want there to be churches all over this world who have some awesome elders.[125]

From the very beginning, Land has had a way of casting a vision for student leaders, to help them see what they can become.

I remember walking in that first week and bringing one of the guys that was clearly a leader, a dynamic guy, and an excellent, excellent, musician, and we walked into the sanctuary. They [the youth] usually meet in a closet of an office for their youth group, and I walked into the sanctuary with him and I said, "Do you see this sanctuary? This is going to be filled with your friends before you graduate." And he was like, "There's no way that can possibly happen." And I said, "It can happen." And before he graduated, it was filled because you gave the vision for the kids that this is your ministry.[126]

Amy Land spoke about the ability of her husband to cast a vision for student leadership.

I think it's vision. I think it's not letting it go a certain way, and not letting that enter your mind. I think it's a lot to do with—he set his mind to it, he gave everybody else that vision, he's a leader, he made other leaders, he made them leaders for their friends, and the kids will listen to their peers, you know, better than him. So he gave the kids, the leaders, that vision of they have to bring people, they have no choice.[127]

Land not only was able to cast vision, he also had a plan. The plan began with building relationships. In building these relationships, Amy Land said, there were two things they emphasized: they emphasized finding out where the kids were spiritually, and finding out where they were in their culture. This meant "getting into their culture and not bringing them necessarily into a church culture." Brian further explained, "We

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[125] Brian and Amy Land interview.

[126] Ibid.

[127] Ibid.

want them to define their spirituality apart from their parents, and we want them to make

it relate to their culture."[128]

Land has identified four different groups of students who are the focus of the

ministry. The way to approach each group would be different. The focus of the ministry

is on the:

- **Community**–The Unconcerned
- **Crowd**–The Curious
- **Congregation**–The Convinced
- **Core**–The Committed[129]

Land has also articulated a strategy for how to help the students grow spiritually.

> An equipped, empowered, and encouraged Leadership Team (both student and adult) who is able to relationally bring students into a Progressive, Contagious, Lifelong Relationship with Jesus Christ so that these would be able do the same with others.

- **Equip**–Give students the tools to advance in their faith.
- **Empower**–Give students the authority and opportunity to use these tools (gifts).
- **Encourage**–Stand beside and behind students as they use these tools (gifts).[130]

A key part of developing student leaders is the DIESeL (Deep Impact –

Equipping Student Leaders) group. One girl, who had been part of the DIESeL group in

high school but who is now a college student and was serving as a summer intern with

Cornerstone, spoke about what this leadership training group had done for her.

> There's also a student leadership team which meets every week, and it's a group of people that are really plugged in and want to serve and want to reach out and want to do kind of volunteer stuff, but reach out to kids on their level. . . . They taught me how to lead a Bible study, how to use my spiritual gifts, what I have

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[128] Ibid.

[129] "Edge Youth: Philosophy of Ministry," Edge Youth web site: www.edgeyouth.com, (Accessed December 2, 2004).

[130] Ibid.

been given, and groomed me through that and taught me what I could do. . .go and actually minister. I can minister to people as a high schooler.[131]

Another intern, who had also been in the DIESeL group expanded on that.

> Our meetings are pretty in-depth. . . . Brian kind of gave us a vision into the youth ministry as a whole, just his purpose and the way and his goals kind of things, the way it was organized. I know that showed me a lot how purposeful ministry is and how it's not just, it wasn't just hanging out, you know, it wasn't just playing games that we played every week, but every game and everything that we did had a purpose, and that was neat to me.

The youth ministry at Cornerstone is called, "Edge." Another key part of

developing student leaders was to have the student leaders periodically take entire

responsibility for the Edge meetings. These student-led Edge meetings became known

affectionately as SLEDGE. Kelly Hennessee, who is relatively new on staff at

Cornerstone as a female discipler, described how SLEDGE works.

> We also have something that I love at this youth group . . . a thing called SLEDGE, student-led EDGE. . . . This time it was only twice a semester, but the student leaders do the whole youth group. . . . And it's totally led by them because it lets them make mistakes, and it teaches them how to be in ministry.[132]

This brief discussion has not even begun to exhaust the plan that Brian Land

articulated for ministry, but it is sufficient to show that he has developed a detailed plan,

or strategy. This plan, along with his vision, was a definite asset for Cornerstone.

4. A supportive congregation.

The congregation has been supportive of the youth ministry, as particularly seen

by the financial investment. Kirsten Oliphant listed the support of the congregation as a

huge asset.[133] But this asset was not without some friction. One of the youth interns said,

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[131] Focus group with summer interns.

[132] Ibid.

[133] Rob and Kirsten Oliphant interview.

"They support it fully as long as it is out of their hair, in a sense, and I say that because Wednesday night [Edge meeting] and Sunday morning are polar opposites." He went on to describe this as a barrier to getting some of the youth to come to Cornerstone for worship. The consensus of the intern focus group was that the service was too "conservative." However, they did comment on the friendliness of the people. One intern said that the first time she came to Cornerstone as a student was for a Sunday morning service. She loved it, and the girls did a great job reaching out to her and inviting her to youth group. Another intern commented on how warmly she was greeted by everybody the first time she came to a worship service.[134]

On the other hand, some of the adults spoke about how the church had changed the worship service to more of a blended service in order to accommodate the youth. Gene Cover spoke about bringing more of the music the students like into the worship service. "Quite a few of us weren't really wild about it, yet we were willing to go along with it to offer them that encouragement and support."[135] Brain Land went further.

> This church has changed because, and due to, and in support of the youth ministry, where our worship has changed in church, to where we're more of a hybrid worship, to where I lead, or someone else who's involved in the youth ministry will lead, the first portion of praise music. And five years ago, six years ago, it was all traditional. And now, so the whole church is getting more acclimated to the youth culture as far as that goes.[136]

Land particularly singled out the elders as being supportive. "The elders are unbelievably supportive of the youth ministry."[137]

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[134] Focus group with summer interns.

[135] Cover interview.

[136] Brian and Amy Land interview.

[137] Ibid.

5. A physical location with enormous potential.

Land described the potential for youth ministry in Katy: "I mean we are in an extraordinarily growing area. The youth ministry potential out here is unlimited, and the church has a heart for the gospel."[138] Later, after he had left the church, when I interviewed him by telephone, Land still listed the physical location as one of the assets of the church. "The potential is enormous for a huge impact on the community."[139]

6. Consistent teaching.

Gene Cover listed as a chief asset that "it's been a consistent trait of our church—good Bible teaching, good foundation, teach the truth, the whole truth, the Bible as completely true." He then described Brian as someone who was like-minded. Cover then concluded that the youth are hearing a consistent story, whether on Wednesday evenings or on Sunday mornings.[140]

Youth ministry volunteer Peter Brownell described Brian Land's teaching as one of the greatest assets of the church. Land teaches the truth, according to Brownell, but in such a way that the youth hear it without being turned off.[141]

Amy Land talked about one specific result of this consistent teaching in the church. "There's a lot of really spiritually mature adults, and so I think that there's probably a lot of prayer that we don't know about that goes on for the youth ministry."[142]

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[138] Ibid.

[139] Brian Land, interview, November 29, 2004.

[140] Cover interview.

[141] Brownell interview.

[142] Brian and Amy Land interview.

How did Cornerstone identify these assets and evaluate their potential contribution?

1. The impact of studying Experiencing God.

Just before the opportunity developed to invite Brian Land to come to the church

for a time of healing from his previous ministry, a group of people in the church had read

the book *Experiencing God* by Henry Blackaby. Gene and Linda Cover studied the book

in a small group from the church. After that, Gene taught the book to an adult Sunday

School class of about 15 people. There was a significant group from the congregation

that bought into what Cover explained as the main concept of the book.

> [The book] goes into why some ministries or some things that you try to do fail.
> It mainly is because it's something you're trying to do because I think it's
> something I'd like to do. The flipside of that is God is around us, He's working,
> He's doing things and our job is to figure out what He's doing and then joining
> Him. And that has a much better chance of success. An understatement.[143]

Gene and Linda Cover both agreed that if they had not read the book, then things

might have turned out differently when it came time to decide whether or not to bring

Brian Land onboard.[144] I heard similar phraseology many times while I was on site at

Cornerstone, about seeing what God is doing and then joining in what He is doing. That

has apparently become part of the culture of the church.

Buck Oliphant described how this concept played an important role in helping the

church recognize its assets for youth ministry, and it might have a similar role in the

transition the church now faces.

> Well, you know, Gene was real big on saying, "Okay, if God is blessing in this
> area, let's run with it," and I couldn't argue with that. . . . And now we have to
> say, "You know, things, we still have an unusually large youth group for this size
> church, but it's not as large as it was two or three years ago." So things are

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[143] Cover interview.

[144] Ibid.

diminishing, so we have to ask, is this something we should continue to push, or do we want to see if maybe God is telling us that we need to shift, do something else. And I think that will have to be dealt with if Brian were to leave, or if I were to leave, they'd have to deal with this.[145]

2. A senior pastor who searches for assets for youth ministry.

Peter Brownell observed, "I think Buck's always put a priority on youth [ministry] with limited resources."[146] Another way to say it would be that Buck does not wait until he has the resources, he searches for resources. Related to that is the fact that Buck is plugged into a lot of networks. Brian Land described how that has helped him.

> Buck has been in Houston a long time, and was at First Presbyterian in downtown Houston, which is one of the biggest churches here, and so he knows a lot of people who have money and just resources. And so that has been an asset, that Buck knows people who know people, and he's helped me to break down the walls . . . . I mean Buck has been enormous as far as identifying resources.[147]

Buck has not only helped Brian Land identify tangible resources, he has also helped Brian develop his own inner resources. "I mean Buck has helped me a lot figure out more who I am as a youth pastor, and we've been here for so long, I mean I've changed a lot." One way Buck has helped Brian change is in the way he has managed his time. "I spend a lot less time on campus. I still spend some, but a lot less." Instead, Land is now spending the bulk of his time with the student leaders.[148]

3. Much of this task was delegated to the youth pastor.

When asked how the church has identified its assets, Brian Land's first answer was, "They haven't." Then he added, "They have asked me to." Then he further

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[145] Buck Oliphant interview.

[146] Brownell interview.

[147] Brian and Amy Land interview.

[148] Ibid.

explained that they have asked him to request whatever resources he needs. "So the

church hasn't really identified that, they just asked me to."[149]

How did the leadership of Cornerstone mobilize the congregation in order to

implement these assets and enable the youth to grow spiritually?

1. Consistent teaching on the authority and responsibility of the elders.

Church secretary Debbie Williams responded in this way to the question of how

the congregation was mobilized:

> Buck is a teaching pastor, he teaches from the pulpit. Understanding the authority
> and the responsibility that the elders have in the life of the church has been
> something that he's spent time preaching on. So our congregation, just by the fact
> that they stay here, is buying into the principle that we are led by elders, and
> there's a lot of trust, there's a lot of trust and a lot of faith.[150]

In terms of how the budgets have been approved to consistently spend so much

money on youth ministry, Kirsten Oliphant explained, "Typically it's just sort of the

elders decide it and the church goes along with it."[151] Gene Cover described it this way

from the perspective of the Session, the governing Board of the church.

> There's been a lot of trust by the congregation in the Session that, you know they
> elected us and are trusting us to do our job, which so far we've not betrayed that, I
> don't think. I think they're looking to us to lead, that's our job, and when we
> come out and say, "This is where we're going, this is why, this is what's going
> on," there's been a lot of trust.[152]

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[149] Ibid.

[150] Williams interview.

[151] Rob and Kirsten Oliphant interview.

[152] Cover interview.

2. A desire for survival that produced a willingness to take risks.

I do not have any specific quotes to support this point, just the overall impression

from all I have learned about the church. When the church's survival was at stake, the

leaders were willing to take some huge risks, and the congregation was willing to follow.

There are other possible ways to respond when one's survival is threatened, but being

willing to take risks is how this congregation responded. That survival instinct, and the

willingness to take risks in response, was a key to mobilizing the congregation to

implement these assets.

3. Seeing results.

As pointed out earlier, the result the congregation most wanted to see was a

growth in the church. The congregation saw some immediate results from hiring Brian

Land.

> When I came in, it [the average attendance] was somewhere around 100, but
> when that church [where I had been] fell apart, people started looking for other
> churches, because there were 800 plus people involved. So we kind of bubbled
> up and went up to 150, 170, 180, almost got to 200, and then the past several
> years we've pretty much been dripping down to 135 on Sunday.[153]

Seeing the results helped mobilize the congregation in support of youth ministry.

But seeing the results works both ways. Church secretary Debbie Williams explained the

struggle the church is now having, as revealed by a congregational survey done by the

pastoral search committee.

> I'm on the search committee, so as we're looking through the surveys it was
> disappointing to us, and very enlightening, to see that the congregation now sees
> us as a split congregation. And kind of like parents and children, that they see it
> as two separate entities, that they don't blend enough, they don't mix enough.
> They feel detached from the youth program. They see a lot of funds going toward
> it, and they don't get to see the results. They're a little bit disenfranchised right

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[153] Brian and Amy Land interview.

now that there is at least a notion by quite a few people that we are a dual church right now.[154]

When questioned about what percentage of the congregation thinks that way, Williams answered, "Probably 30 to 40 percent."[155]

In commenting on the impact of his departure from the church, Brian Land said that one impact would be the removal of a huge burden.

> A burden has been lifted. Maintaining a big youth ministry in a small church is a huge burden. Ministry now has an opportunity to become more holistic, more balanced, ministering to families in a total way. My leaving helps to lift that burden of a huge youth ministry.[156]

Rogers Memorial Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church

The present Rogers Memorial ARP church is the result of the merger of two congregations in 1989. Eden Terrace ARP church was a dying congregation that had a building in a potentially good location. Rogers Memorial, which had originally been organized as a church in 1952, had grown quickly to around 200 people, but had then begun a slow decline. The neighborhood around the Rogers Memorial Church had changed, and according to Dale Dove, who has been at the church since 1974, the church was not prepared at that time to minister to the newer people in the neighborhood. The merged church kept the Eden Terrace location and the Rogers Memorial name. They sold the old Rogers Memorial property.[157]

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[154] Williams interview.

[155] Ibid.

[156] Brian Land, interview, November 29, 2004.

[157] Dale Dove, interview by author, tape recording, Rock Hill, SC, September 30, 2004; and "Rogers Memorial," in Randall T. Ruble, ed., *Bicentennial History of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: McNaughton & Gunn, 2003), 522-523.

Rogers is located in Rock Hill, South Carolina. Rock Hill is in York County. The year 2000 population of the city of Rock Hill was 49,765 people, but the population within a 15-mile radius was 194,191 in 2003. Rock Hill has easy access to Charlotte, North Carolina, via I-77. Charlotte is 18 miles away.[158]

Dale Dove, who has served as an elder at Rogers, and who was one of the driving forces behind the current youth ministry, explained that the current youth ministry grew out of a revitalization of the church that began in 1996.

> After the initial excitement [of the merger], then the decline started again in the church. Several things happened in there, pastors changed and so forth—but we about 1996 started asking, "What's wrong? Why are we here? Why do we even exist as a congregation?" We were a very loving group to each other, and if you would come into our church, we will love you, too. But we were not going out looking for you.[159]

Dove spoke about how Outreach North America, the home missions agency of the ARP denomination, had "courted us" to participate in their revitalization program. The leadership of the church had investigated the revitalization program, but they were concerned about a certain aspect of it. They had then decided that they wanted to pursue the same objective in a different way.

> So we started our own little revitalization thing, and that guy [a consultant from the Navigators] introduced us to a book called, it was new then, called *The Purpose-Driven Church,* by a guy named Warren. And he hadn't even read it, but he said, "This is good and it might go along with what we're doing." He was meeting with us once a month at our place, which I think is a very good approach, but anyway that was what he was doing. And so this little core group started looking at that book, and all of a sudden our questions started getting answered. "Why do we exist? We exist to—basically it's the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. We needed to show God we loved Him by loving the people

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[158] "Rock Hill, South Carolina," web site, http://www.city-data.com/city/Rock-Hill-South-Carolina.html (Accessed December 3, 2004); and South Carolina Department of Commerce, "Welcome to Rock Hill, South Carolina," web site, http://www.teamsc.com/commpro/commfull.cfm?GNIS=11304 (Accessed December 3, 2004).

[159] Dove interview.

that He created. Loving the people that He loved—we were not doing that. We knew we were not doing that, and that was damning, but it was also enlightening and freeing.[160]

Out of this process, the church realized that, honestly, the Great Commission "was not even on the doggone radar with us." That was the key realization that took place and that sparked the revitalization of the church. Dove observed this about the motivation for revitalization: "Almost without exception it's evangelism that drives that, that is the fuel for the engine that drives it to move outside and to make a difference."[161]

According to Dove, this created an appetite in that core of people within the church who had read *The Purpose-Driven Church.* This core wanted to get better, wanted to reach the lost, but they needed to learn how to do it. They were also trying to communicate this back to the whole congregation. The problem was trying to communicate a need for change to a group that was comfortable with where they were, people who basically said, "This works, I'm being fed, I'm cool, why do we need to change stuff?" The good news was that the congregation "was loving enough," that Dove credits them with beginning to change "even through our inadequacies in trying to communicate it." But all this created an appetite to want to study and learn more.[162]

Another problem the church faced, even after developing a heart to reach out to the lost, was deciding where to direct its efforts. "Who are they and where do we start?" As the congregation began looking at their community with a heart for the lost, they realized that the lost were all around them. Dove described it as being like a "seizure,

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[160] Ibid.

[161] Ibid.

[162] Ibid.

with so many inputs firing at the same time, you became paralyzed."[163] They needed a

target.

Shortly after this, the church began to reconsider how it was doing the youth

program. Dove explained the connection.

> So those things [the revitalization efforts] helped shape where we were going.
> We then knew that youth ministry was important. We had gone through five
> youth workers in six years . . . . We would find that people would say, "Do you
> have a youth program?" "Yeah, we got a youth worker." You know, and there
> were several of us that would try to help, but it was over here, it was an
> appendage.[164]

Steve Stegall, who grew up in the church and who is now on its full-time staff,

described where the church was with youth ministry at that time.

> We were going through youth pastors pretty quickly. It was either a stepping
> stone for them, number one, or we might have been doing them a disservice by
> hiring them and crossing our arms and saying, "We have a youth pastor now, you
> do it". . .basically putting them on the job and letting them do it. . . . It was
> mainly just not a major thrust of the church, or the church didn't view it as
> significant, nor did we spend resources on it or time or effort on it, it was just an
> appendage to the church.[165]

Stegall also described how the church would swing on a pendulum in terms of

what it was seeking in a youth pastor. The congregation would get one who was detail

oriented, who could please parents and church leadership, but who lacked relational skills

with the youth. Then they would seek the next youth pastor with great relational skills,

especially with the students, but this one would have difficulty with the details and with

parents. So then they would swing back to a detail person as youth pastor, and so on.[166]

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[163] Ibid.

[164] Ibid.

[165] Steve Stegall, interview by author, tape recording, Rock Hill, SC, September 30, 2004.

[166] Ibid.

Realizing that what they were doing was not working led the church to form a

youth team. "It was a couple of members of the church, and we were going to oversee

the youth program for the church."[167] Dove explained that it was during the tenure of

their last youth pastor, who happened to be the best one that the church had ever had, that

the church's leadership formed the youth team. Having a youth team was not the youth

pastor's idea, but at least he was amenable to it. But then he left and moved to Texas.

And after he left, Dove made this observation.

> Every time we went without a pastor, every time we went without a youth leader,
> things got better in one way. The better is more people had to step up because
> there was nobody else who was going to do it. And that's a principle that needs to
> be there whether there's a pastor or not. . . . One of the fallacies in the way that
> we found that we had done church is we depended on the pastor, or we depended
> on the youth leader, to do things and so people became consumers as opposed to
> active ministers.[168]

With the new mindset of having the church actively oversee the youth ministry

rather than delegating it to a youth pastor, the youth team went to a youth ministry

conference that was led by Blaine Bartel from Church on the Move in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Bartel had led the development of a huge youth ministry in Tulsa called Oneighty. The

conference was in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. The team from Rogers learned a lot of

practical things about youth ministry at this conference, but the most significant thing

about the conference was being introduced to some statistics from a study by Thom

Rainer of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Bartel

quoted two statistics from Rainer's book *A Bridger Generation*, two statistics that would

have a huge impact on the development of ministry at Rogers Memorial. As Dove

explained it, in a study of 4,000 Christians, Rainer reported that 81 percent of them had

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[167] Ibid.

[168] Dove interview.

accepted Christ by the time they were 19 years old. So for the youth team at Rogers, that identified for them the most receptive group for evangelism. The second statistic was one that showed that each succeeding generation in America since the Builder generation, which was born before 1946, has had a smaller percentage of people professing Christ as Lord than the previous generation. Following these trends, it is projected that, of the present youth generation, only 4 percent will profess Christ as Lord.

> Those two things intersected right there. The largest unreached people group around us with the time when people make decisions for Christ. Those two things intersect on late elementary, middle, or high school. And we said, "That's the target!"[169]

It was about this time that Brian Phipps came to be the pastor at Rogers Memorial. Phipps had read the same book that had been so influential in starting the revitalization at Rogers, *The Purpose-Driven Church* by Rick Warren. Phipps had also been through the denomination's revitalization program at a church in Florida. As Stegall said, "He had that same mindset." Phipps was installed as pastor in July 2000.[170]

According to Phipps, the church then compared the statistics with the resource allocation in a typical church. They noted that the typical church spent over 80 percent of its resources on the adults, the group that was statistically least receptive to the gospel, while spending few resources on the group that was statistically most receptive. "We decided we're going to change the paradigm."[171]

During this time, the church was actually looking for another youth pastor. As Dove evaluates it now, it was a good thing that God did not send one because it really

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[169] Ibid.

[170] Dove and Stegall interviews.

[171] Brian Phipps, interview by author, tape recording, Rock Hill, SC, May 3, 2004.

caused the leadership of the church to take ownership of the ministry. "And youth

ministry is too important to become the ministry of one person." He specifically singled

out the governing board of the church, the Session, as needing to take responsibility to

make sure that it happens. The Session at Rogers Memorial did that through empowering

the youth team. Three of the people on the youth team were Dale Dove, Steve Stegall,

and Andy Mullins (whose job subsequently transferred him out of the area, to

Virginia).[172]

Dove, Stegall, and Mullins began reading all they could find on youth ministry.

They subscribed to youth ministry magazines, and they went to youth ministry

conferences. One of the conferences they attended was at the Church on the Move in

Tulsa, Oklahoma.[173] Stegall described what happened in Tulsa.

> We went to that conference and saw a lot of things that we could do, a lot of
> things that we didn't think we could do. It was a very large ministry, a very large
> church. But we did have several hours available before our plane flight to come
> back. And we were sitting in a Pizza Hut and jotted down what we wanted to do
> when we got back. That's probably where the concept of the PointE was, the
> birth of the PointE was, sitting at that Pizza [Hut]. I actually still have the Pizza
> Hut plate that I jotted all the notes on, I have it at home with all the notes–the
> structure, the organizational structure for the PointE on that Pizza Hut plate.[174]

Through their study, according to Dove, the church already knew by this time that

there were 16,000 middle and high school students in York County, and 12,000 in Rock

Hill. The youth team figured that if they could take the three largest youth ministries in

the country and put them in York County, they still would not be able to reach half the

students in the county. "At that point it changed from focusing on having a youth

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[172] Dove interview.

[173] Ibid.

[174] Stegall interview.

program for Rogers Memorial Church." They determined to create an evangelistic ministry that would unite churches in the county, and that would target all the middle and high school students in the county. This was a huge goal, and Rogers was a small church. "Our church, when we started the PointE, was running 60 to 80, maybe on a high Sunday 100 people, on a Sunday morning."[175]

The Session approved starting The PointE. They also let the church's fellowship hall be turned into a huge game room, and they gave the money that had been budgeted for a youth worker as start-up money. Dove said, "So we had $21,000 and the fellowship hall to start."

The PointE's opening night was in September 2001. The crowd on the first night was 196 students. Phipps explained that "God just gave us a vision of investing in a huge youth evangelism center where churches around the community that are all our size" could bring their youth group on a periodic basis for an evangelism night. Other churches could make this the evangelism component of their ministry. In a handout to youth leaders, the PointE staff explains that this ministry is a resource for other youth groups and other churches.

> When you attend, we encourage you to get your students to invite their unchurched friends to meet with *your* youth group at *your* church, and come as a group to the PointE. Your job is to follow-up with the friends of your students and help them connect with your youth group.[176]

Later in the same handout is a note about free resources.

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[175] Dove.

[176] "The PointE Youth Leader Info" handout, received at The PointE on October 3, 2004. [emphasis theirs]

> We at The PointE want to help you be the best youth worker and leader possible. So, we provide FREE to you some of the very best youth worker magazines around. Get them at the information desk.[177]

In January 2002, the PointE was able to move into a 38,000 square foot facility. The youth leader handout explains how that was provided.

> Through the generosity of the Catawba Indian Nation, God has provided this 38,000 sq. ft. former Belks department store as a temporary home for The PointE. We are still looking for a permanent facility with two 10,000+ sq. ft. rooms—one for a game room and one for a worship space.[178]

The way I have spelled The PointE is not a misprint. It does have a capital "E" at the end. A publicity brochure for The PointE explains. "The point of The PointE is to help middle and high school students follow Jesus to eternal life. That's the big 'E'"[179]

The PointE meets from 6:05 until 8:15 p.m. every Sunday night during the school year. When I observed The PointE on October 3, 2004, there were 421 students in attendance, 121 of whom were first-time registrants. The PointE has a well organized registration system to keep track of all who attend. All adults in attendance have to register, and are photographed for security reasons. The PointE staff, all wearing orange shirts with The PointE logo, are visible everywhere. All the staff that I questioned understood their jobs and were enthusiastic about the evangelistic ministry of The PointE. Most of the staff I met were from Rogers Memorial. The staff has done an amazing job of turning the facility into an attractive environment for students.

For the first half of the evening, the students play games in the game room, or enjoy refreshments in the café. There is a separate area for senior high students, although

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[177] Ibid.

[178] Ibid.

[179] "16,019 Middle & High School Students in York County: What's The PointE?," undated publicity brochure.

the majority of the crowd is middle school age. The games include half-court basketball, many pool tables and foosball tables, and a variety of other games. The second half of the evening takes place in the worship center, which is well equipped for a high-tech generation. Normally there is a band, followed by a talk presented at the students' level, then a call for commitment. On this night, there was a special program featuring a Christian rap musician. Several special nights each year are designed to attract a larger crowd.

The impressive thing about this evening was what happened when the director of The PointE, Dale Dove, was unexpectedly detained by an accident involving one of the band members. The evening went on as planned even though there was confusion about where Dove was and when he would arrive. The staff met at 5:45 p.m., prior to the students entering at 6:05, prayed together, reviewed the schedule for the evening, then everyone was dismissed to his or her volunteer work stations with the words, "Go and serve with joy."

Stegall clarified that The PointE is not the Rogers Memorial youth group. The PointE is an evangelistic ministry of the church. The church also has what they consider to be their youth group, called Counter PointE, which is basically a small-group ministry for the youth of the church.[180] Dove explained how they needed to care for their own kids even while reaching out to a larger group.

> Our youth almost lost their separate identity. It's more, it's something that matters to them. They've lost that cohesiveness among themselves because they've become part of a much larger group. So that's been something that we didn't pay enough attention to, and we're starting to pay more attention to that now because they've missed having that smaller, intimate group. They were injected into this larger group, although they were serving, they were having a

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[180] Stegall interview.

purpose, they didn't have their small group. As you grow larger, you have to grow smaller at the same time. We had grown larger, but we had neglected the growing smaller part.[181]

Both Stegall and Dove identified two different groups of students that they serve. Through The PointE, they seek to serve all the middle and high school students of York County. But through Counter PointE, they seek to serve the kids in the church, some of whom are students who started at The PointE, then decided to come to Rogers Memorial as their youth group. One goal of The Pointe is to connect students to a local church.[182] Phipps indicated that almost all of the middle and high school students of Rogers Memorial serve as staff at The PointE.[183]

Having summarized the case, we now turn our attention to how this case addresses our research questions.

What assets did Rogers Memorial have that contributed to the spiritual growth of the youth in the church and in the community?

1. Lay leadership with a vision for church revitalization.

Phipps saw a real asset in the lay leadership of the church, particularly Dale Dove. Phipps describes Dove as "the one God got a hold of." Dove is an attorney, and he has been a longtime elder in the church. But it was not only Dove, it was all the leadership. "We spent hours on this stuff, but yeah, the leadership, it couldn't have been done without the leadership." Dove pointed to several other people who were instrumental in

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[181] Dove interview.

[182] Dove and Stegall interviews.

[183] Phipps interview.

determining the purpose of the church. He specifically mentioned Louise Lesslie, Arthur Thompson, and Bobby Stegall.[184]

Lay leadership was crucial because the church changed pastors after things starting developing in 1996, and the church was even without a pastor for some of that time. So the crucial aspect was the lay leadership. Yet two of the church's pastors had a significant role, so we turn to the second asset.

2. *Two different senior pastors with a vision for church revitalization.*

Steve Reynolds was at Rogers when the revitalization process started in 1996. Dove identified Reynolds as "a big catalyst in the whole effort." Dove called Reynolds a man who is "able to look way down the road much further than most people and see trends. . .he was on this team in 1996." Reynolds had to leave the church for personal reasons.[185]

Brian Phipps came in July 2000. Stegall said that when Phipps came he fit right in, so everybody was "on the same page when he walked in, it didn't miss a lick, and he just took off." Phipps is the primary teacher at The PointE, and he is "very much a supporter of it."[186]

3. *Flexibility.*

Stegall regarded this as the chief asset of the church. "Well, our number one asset is flexibility, we're very flexible in structure and in function."[187] The church knows what

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[184] Ibid.

[185] Dove interview.

[186] Stegall interview.

[187] Ibid.

its purpose is, and it knows its target. Knowing that, it is flexible to reallocate assets to accomplish the purpose and to reach the target. This will be discussed more fully below.

4. Faith that produces a willingness to take risks.

Stegall has served as the treasurer for The Pointe. He said, "We've been down at the bottom of the barrel a thousand times and the money just comes in." He gave a specific example from last summer, when the church needed money to startup The PointE again for a new year of ministry.

> We had to have $2,800 and me and Dale stopped and prayed for that at that moment. And that was a Friday at lunch. Dale called me Saturday at lunch. He was cutting grass and his mail came. He went to his mailbox and there was a $3,000 check in the mailbox. It was made the day before. The gentleman had no idea that we were in need. . . . It takes $1,600 a week to fund The PointE.[188]

The fact of a church averaging under 100 people in attendance each Sunday taking on as ambitious a project as The Pointe indicates an amazing willingness to take risks. Phipps described the way some of his colleagues responded to the idea.

> This vision was huge, and all of my contemporaries that I knew at the time–and I can start naming pastors–they said, "This is never going to fly." And they would almost mock me when I would bring this up.[189]

5. A plan for spiritual growth.

This was Phipps' first response to a question about the assets of the church: "We have a very intentional life development process that students and adults can follow." Phipps helped develop this growth process because of what he felt was a misunderstanding in the way he himself had been taught.

> All I knew, being in Presbyterian and Reformed circles, is that the more you knew, the more spiritual you were. But I learned that was a huge

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[188] Ibid.

[189] Phipps interview.

misunderstanding. You know, the fruit of the Spirit, our spiritual growth is done in life change and being involved in all the areas of ministry God wants us to be in.[190]

When asked to define how he understands youth ministry, Stegall answered,

> First of all, reaching students for Christ, evangelism; then establishing a method of discipling them to growing a relationship with Christ; and getting them connected into a church body so they can have fellowship and accountability.[191]

I asked Stegall if this could be summarized as three key things: reaching, discipling, and connecting. And he responded, "Certainly."

Since The PointE is an evangelistic ministry, its leadership assumes that they will be reaching kids who know almost nothing about the church or church life. So they have developed a tool, Highway 605, to help disciple students and get them connected with a church. It is based on a similar program at the Church on the Move in Tulsa. The name comes from what has become The PointE team's favorite Bible verse, Deuteronomy chapter 6, verse 5.[192] This verse says, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." The numbers also stand for key elements of the journey to spiritual growth, as listed in the front of the "Highway 605" booklet:

> **6 Road Maps for Direction**–there are 6 "road maps" (audio & music lessons) which will give you direction in this trip. The lessons cover the basics about God and the relationship He wants with YOU. Each lesson has a worksheet, found in this booklet. Compete [sic] the worksheet as you listen to each lesson.
> **0 Detours**–Detours on your trip can really slow you down. Some can get you really mixed up and make you lose your bearings. Others can be downright disastrous! Some of the big detours to avoid are alcohol, illegal drug usage, and having immorality in your life. Once you have completed the 6 lessons, you will then be challenged to take the "0" Detours Pledge to abstain from the illegal use of alcohol and drugs, and to avoid immorality in your life.

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[190] Ibid.

[191] Stegall interview.

[192] Dove interview.

5 Friends for the Trip–Road tips are BORING without friends. So bring 'em on 5 occasions–either to your church or youth group. Any combination will do. Just bring a friend along on 5 different occasions.[193]

Stegall clarified that The PointE team does not want a student thinking of The PointE as their church. "It's not a church, it's definitely outreach. . . . It's very, very important that they get involved in a church somewhere." So The PointE's spiritual growth process includes not only discipleship, but getting students connected to a church.

1. A Supportive Congregation.

The congregation supports The PointE financially. Stegall estimated that over 75 percent of the funds to operate The Pointe come from people at Rogers Memorial.[194]

The congregation also supports youth and children's ministry by their participation. In addition to the PointE, there is Counter PointE for the church's own youth, and a newer ministry, Cross PointE, for elementary school age children. Phipps explained, "Out of an average attendance of 215, to have 60 or 70 [volunteers] involved [in The Pointe] and another 25 or 30 involved with the [Cross PointE] elementary ministry—that's incredible!"

How did Rogers Memorial identify these assets and evaluate their potential contribution?

1. Passion and leadership.

Phipps said, "I don't know that there was a plan to identify the strengths, they just said, 'We gotta have passion for it and clear leadership.'" It appears to me, as an outside

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[193] "Highway 605: Take a Road Trip," (Rock Hill, SC: The PointE, 2003), unnumbered page.

[194] Stegall interview.

observer, that passion and leadership were the beginning ingredients for identifying the assets. This is what drove the church to find out what it could do.

2. *Knowing their purpose.*

It is significant that Dove traced the roots of the present youth ministry to the revitalization efforts that began in 1996. The key to understanding decisions the leadership would later make, and risks that they would later take, is to understand that they knew their purpose: the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. They also knew their target. As a result, they felt sure of God's call.

> It was very much a mountain in front of us. We didn't think we could do it. But we knew that God had called us to do it. And if He called us to do it, we were going to go in that direction. We didn't know exactly how we were going to get there or what was going to happen at the end, but He had called us and so the strength was in hearing God's call and starting to walk in that direction, and just having the faith He was going to provide.[195]

Knowing their purpose led them to be willing to do whatever it takes, and to reallocate assets if necessary. Phipps gave the example of reallocating the church's fellowship hall to serve primarily as a game room for The PointE before the Catawba Indians provided the space that had been a Belk's department store. So Phipps maintained that it was not so much identifying what assets they had, but deciding how they would allocate current assets. The church was even flexible enough to change its adult program in order to free up assets for the youth outreach. When they realized that The PointE was going to draw more students than they expected, the church was willing to reallocate the sanctuary from being used for a Sunday evening service for the adults to being used as a worship center for The PointE on Sunday evenings.[196]

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[195] Dove interview.

[196] Phipps interview.

3. *Intentional study.*

Dove spoke about doing basic research and development. They researched youth, and they researched other places.[197]

The leadership became students of youth. Earlier I described how they went to conferences, subscribed to magazines, and read. They did even more than that on the local level. They started paying attention to youth.

> You go where they go. Find out what they like to do. How do you learn about a people group? How do they spend their time? They spend their time playing games, watching TV and being in school and going to the mall and, you know, buying CD's, playing sports and those things. You start becoming a student of what those things are.[198]

In their research they found that the youth are "not just one big tribe. . .but there's sub-groups." Dove remarked that almost no church has the kind of numbers that Rogers has from the research they have done. The students spend most of their time in school, so their research even included the schools, and "how you can communicate in those schools." So the leadership became students of youth.

They also studied other localities where groups or churches were doing a good job of reaching out to youth. Dove explained why they studied other places. "People that have been in church for a long time, they get so myopic in what they know and what they even accept. I mean go out and look at other places."[199]

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[197] Dove interview.

[198] Ibid.

[199] Ibid.

4. Experiment.

Dove described the mindset of the leadership that "everything's an experiment."

He elaborated, "If you're not making mistakes, you're not doing anything. And so

it's okay to make mistakes, but try and experiment and see if it works."[200]

How did the leadership of Rogers Memorial mobilize the congregation in order

to implement these assets ad enable youth to grow spiritually?

1. The influence of a passionate lay leader.

Andy Mullins, who helped develop The PointE but who now lives in Virginia,

spoke about the passion of Dale Dove. "His passion for youth has spread and touched

many people."[201] Phipps called Dove a master of "inspiring participation." He

explained.

> He just happens to be an attorney and a longtime elder, and an attorney with many
> assets of his own and very influential. . . . The way he bought into this was able
> to carry, carry the decisions, and they were all unanimous, but they were not
> easy.[202]

2. Giving people in the congregation opportunities and training.

Dove spoke about the fact that they provide members of the congregation

opportunities to be involved, and they provide training. He listed some of the

opportunities:

> Parking cars, greeting people, serving food, watching games, serving as ushers,
> doing technical stuff, working with the stuff store, working at the Highway 605
> table, working in the DJ booth, working at the information desk, taking pictures,
> refereeing basketball games, all those things.[203]

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[200] Ibid.

[201] Andy Mullins, interview by author, telephone and email attachment, July 19, 2004.

[202] Phipps interview.

[203] Dove interview.

Because people were involved, they developed a sense of ownership. But as

Phipps pointed out, the fact that they were involved also put them into the position to see

the results. "And so a lot of people came, and then they were there when God brought

the students, and saw the thing happen."[204]

3. Casting the vision and helping the congregation see results.

We have already seen how the leaders at Rogers cast the vision for the ministry.

They also helped the people see the results.

The people have seen the average attendance at worship rise to over 200 people.

They have also seen the congregational demographics change, with a greater number of

young families with children in the congregation.[205]

The people have seen the results in the students coming to The PointE.

Dove recited some of the statistics.

> We have had probably close to 600 students say that they've made first-time
> commitments to Christ. We have had probably over 2,200 students say that they
> have made rededications, recommitments of their life to Christ. We've got over
> 2,000 students who have taken Highway 605 and heard those things. We have
> probably given out, I would say, I know it's well over, probably between 1,000
> and 2,000 new believer CD's, telling somebody what it means to be a Christian.[206]

One way Phipps describes the results is in terms of how the congregation has been

revitalized. Phipps described some of the new ministries in the church, including the

Cross PointE ministry to younger kids. But a lot of that has come about because of The

PointE.

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[204] Phipps interview.

[205] Ibid.

[206] Dove interview.

It's infused momentum in the church, it's infused joy and celebration in the church, it's infused passion for the lost in the church, it's infused passion for ministry in the church. It's kind of like the concept of revitalization in The PointE. Revitalization started it. . .and then since the investment in The PointE it has just been cyclical, each program worked off each other to build momentum.[207]

4. Teaching.

The leadership had taught the congregation that loving God means loving people. "If we want to honor God with our lives, then we best be telling people about Him, and about how to become Christians, and who Christ was, and what He gave His life for." The leadership had also taught the congregation about how they are to be using their resources. They reinforce this teaching through letters, meetings, sermons, etc.[208]

5. Developing a plan and implementing the plan.

Mobilizing the congregation involved planning and implementation. As Dove said, "Coming up with a plan that people can get behind and working that plan, telling them how they can become involved, and giving them opportunities, giving them training."[209]

Lakeside Presbyterian Church

Lakeside Presbyterian Church began as a mission congregation in 1985. Lakeside was a daughter congregation of Coddle Creek Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, Mooresville, North Carolina. Coddle Creek recognized the need for a new church in the

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[207] Phipps interview.

[208] Dove interview.

[209] Ibid interview.

growing area of Lake Norman. The mission formally became an organized church in 1990.[210]

The Lake Norman area is an affluent community about halfway between the cities of Charlotte and Statesville, North Carolina, along the I-77 corridor. According to longtime member and elder Haywood Collier, "most of the people would consider it a semi-suburb of Charlotte." Most of the people in the area who commute to work commute toward Charlotte. Charlotte is growing quickly northward along the I-77 corridor.[211]

Everyone I asked about the development of the youth ministry pointed to the Appalachia mission as a key point in its development. The Appalachia mission is a mission trip for high school students sponsored by the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church's Office of Covenant Discipleship. The Covenant Discipleship Website provided details about the mission:

> Last year we served 19 different locations in the mountains where Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia meet. Each team will offer Vacation Bible School at local churches and other locations for the children in these communities. The groups will be staying and eating at Lincoln Memorial University in Harrogate, TN. The entire group will gather each evening for a time of worship, prayer and encouragement. This mission trip offers a great opportunity for senior high school youth groups to be involved in Christian outreach in an area of the country that is in need.[212]

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[210] "History of Lakeside Presbyterian Church," Lakeside Presbyterian Church web site, http://www.lakesidepresbyterian.org/history.htm., (Accessed December 8, 2004).

[211] Haywood Collier, interview by author, tape recording, Charlotte, NC, November 11, 2004; and John Dawson, interview by author, tape recording, Mooresville, NC, October 2, 2003.

[212] "The Appalachia Mission," Covenant Discipleship web site, http://www.covenantdiscipleship.org/theappalachiamission.html., (Accessed December 8, 2004.)

Haywood Collier explained that there was a group of students who were all about

the same age and had moved up from elementary school together. His daughter was one

of these students.

> By the time they got to middle school, I started seeing what I felt was a need to
> get those kids more involved. You know, besides Sunday School and Wednesday
> nights. So we started–so I started looking into things to do with middle school
> age and high school age youth. One of the first things I saw was Appalachia, and
> we actually took our first group up there as they had just completed eighth grade
> instead of ninth grade, so it was actually a year early. . . . Our group was entirely
> those who had just completed eighth grade. We took eight that year.[213]

The Lakeside group took eight, and they combined with two other churches to

make a team of 18-20 youth to do the Vacation Bible School for one of the sites for the

Appalachia mission. Collier explained that his motivation for taking the group was to

"see some growth in them outside the normal Sunday School and Wednesday night

programs."[214]

Lakeside's pastor, John Dawson, described the Appalachia mission as a key point

because of what it did for the kids who went. It got them out of their affluent setting to

see people with real need. It also gave the students an opportunity to minister to other

people and to see people respond to their ministry. Dawson said, "Kids in a Vacation

Bible School setting will often make a profession of faith. . .that had a great impact on

our kids." It also stretched the students to have to lead the Vacation Bible School.

"When you do something like that, you realize, 'I need to know the Scripture more; I

need to know my faith more.'" Dawson mentioned how one boy who had been attending

the church realized through this that "I really can't do that because I really don't know

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[213] Collier interview.

[214] Ibid.

Jesus." And so preparing for the Appalachia mission provided an opportunity to present the gospel to a student who wanted to go on the trip.[215]

After the first Appalachia mission trip, Collier said, "We started to beef up the activities and programs we did for them. We had done hit or miss type things." They added some of the denominational youth ministry events. They also started taking a group to an annual conference called "Dare2share."[216] The church's youth pastor, Charles Morrow, described "Dare2share" as a conference that travels around the country and that is "trying to get people excited about evangelism."[217]

Dawson mentioned another place the youth group has sometimes gone. The Upper Room ministry in Statesville, North Carolina, is an evangelistic ministry where the students can bring their friends.[218]

Besides these special trips, the regular programs for the youth are Sunday night Bible study or youth choir, a Wednesday night all-church dinner followed by youth club, and Sunday morning Sunday School. In addition, the group will do periodic social and service activities.

In October 2002 the church hired Charles Morrow as a part-time youth pastor. Prior to coming to Lakeside, Morrow was familiar with the church through the Appalachian mission. He also knew Haywood Collier very well.[219]

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[215] John Dawson interview.

[216] Collier interview.

[217] Charles Morrow, interview by author, tape recording, Mooresville, NC, October 14, 2003.

[218] Dawson interview.

[219] Collier and Morrow interviews.

Prior to Morrow coming, youth ministry events were led by the students and by

adult volunteers. According to Collier, the parents were able to maintain "a fairly

structured program." They modeled their Wednesday evening program on that of Pump

Springs Baptist Church in Harrogate, Tennessee, a church they had met through the

Appalachia mission. The year before Morrow came, the Wednesday youth club was

averaging 30 students each Wednesday night and "8-10 of them would be guests; friends

of the kids who were there." Collier admitted that sometimes it was a struggle to keep

things going without someone "committed to it all the time." Therefore, the Christian

education committee recommended that the church hire a part-time youth pastor.[220]

Both Collier and Dawson spoke about some difficulty in getting approval for that

recommendation. Collier explained:

> It was not hard to convince people of the sense of need. I think the financial side
> of it was probably harder for us and ultimately the financial side was resolved by
> designated giving to that one purpose. We had enough sense of need for that
> person that we had some people step up to the plate and give some designated
> gifts which made it easier for the deacons to say, "Okay, we can put it as a line
> item in the budget because we have some money sitting over here on the side that
> will cover it if we should need it."[221]

The group changed the summer before Morrow came on staff. The group of kids

that had come up through the church since elementary school, the group that had gone on

that first Appalachia mission, graduated the summer before Marrow started in October.

This had an impact on the remaining students. "We don't have as many people and so

it's not cool." Morrow struggled to keep in mind that numbers were not the most

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[220] Collier interview.

[221] Ibid.

important thing, but rather, "it's making sure that those that are here already are fed the

Word of God."[222]

Collier elaborated:

We have had some kids that have had some difficulty adjusting to the fact that there are such small numbers. And it is hard—when you have a large number of youth it's fairly easy to bring visitors into a program. I don't see that happening now. I don't know if it's our format or size or what. . . . Some of the kids will still invite friends, but it is not like it used to be. Our kids used to invite friends all the time.[223]

The church is still able to draw students for the special trips such as the

Appalachia mission and Dare2share. The church web site lists 11 students and 3 advisors

as part of the 2004 Appalachia mission trip. They combined with another church to give

them a total of 14 students for the trip.[224] Collier said that students will invite their

friends to Dare2share, or to Bonclarken (the denomination's conference center), because

they provide attractive settings.[225]

Even with smaller numbers, the youth still remain active. Collier gave as an

example the team that went to the Appalachia mission last summer. Prior to going to

Appalachia, those same kids practically ran Lakeside's Vacation Bible School.[226]

Morrow is concentrating on building relationships with the students.[227] When I visited

one of the youth club meetings in July 2004, there were 15 students there, of whom one

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[222] Morrow interview.

[223] Collier interview.

[224] "2004 Appalachia Mission Trip," Lakeside Presbyterian Church web site, http://www.lakesidepresbyterian.org/appalachia.html, (Accessed December 8, 2004).

[225] Collier interview.

[226] Ibid.

[227] Morrow interview.

was a college freshman. One boy told me that he did not come to youth group before

Charles came. "Charles is not really a youth pastor, he's a friend. He hangs out with [he

gave the names of three guys] once a week."[228] To put the size of the youth ministry in

perspective, the church's average Sunday morning worship attendance is only about 100

people.[229]

Morrow gave this evaluation of how the ministry is going so far since he has been

there:

> I think we're doing a good job of ministering to them as far as letting them know
> the gospel, the love of God. I think we're doing a good job of that. What we're
> not doing a good job of is getting them excited enough to bring their friends in,
> and I'm struggling with that.[230]

Now we shall consider Lakeside Presbyterian Church's ministry in regard to our

research questions.

What assets did Lakeside Presbyterian have that contributed to the spiritual growth

of the youth in the church and in the community?

1. Lay leadership with a vision for helping kids grow.

Many people in the congregation have helped as volunteers to lead various

aspects of the youth ministry, but one man seems to have had the primary vision for

helping kids grow: Haywood Collier. Charles Morrow spoke about Collier's desire for

youth ministry, his desire for getting the gospel out to kids, and his love for kids.[231]

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[228] Personal observations by author, July 21, 2004.

[229] Dawson and Collier interviews. Dawson estimated 110, while Collier estimated 90.

[230] Morrow interview.

[231] Ibid.

Collier is currently chairman of the church's Christian Education Committee.[232] Dawson noted that it was Collier who led the Appalachia mission that has been such a key component of the youth ministry. And even though Collier's daughter has now graduated, he continues to be involved in the ministry.[233]

2. *Willingness to combine with and learn from other churches.*

Lakeside has been willing to combine with other churches to do things it was not large enough to do on its own. For example, they did not have enough youth to form a team for the Appalachia mission, so they have been willing to combine with others. They have taken advantage of events drawing larger groups of students, such as denominational conferences and Dare2share. They have also been willing to use other churches' programs as models for their youth club, such as that of Pump Street Baptist.[234]

3. *A supportive senior pastor.*

Dawson has not been as obvious a leader in developing a vision for youth ministry as the pastors of other studied churches have been, yet he has been supportive. Morrow said of Dawson:

> John Dawson, I think, is one of the best supporting pastors around here because he's always constantly, you know, not in your face about it, but you know that he is behind you 100 percent. He'd do anything in the world for you to help you out, and get the youth excited about something and to help you out with youth.[235]

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[232] Collier interview.

[233] Dawson interview.

[234] Collier interview.

[235] Morrow interview.

4. A supportive congregation.

The church devoted 7 percent of its budget in 2003 to youth, including the youth

pastor's compensation and support for the Appalachia mission.[236] But that does not

reflect all the financial and other support given to youth ministry. Morrow explained:

> I've had lots of people just give me a check and say, "Use this wherever you need
> to." Fundraisers have been good here . . . if you need something, it's provided for
> you. . . . They pray a lot for us. Prayer, I think, is the most important thing in my
> opinion. We're always included in their prayer lists.[237]

One specific example of congregational support was the congregation building a

youth room for the youth. Dawson said that the congregation has many creative people

who took some space that was not being used well and reconfigured it into a room just

for the youth. That was an example Dawson gave for his contention that "quite a number

of people" are committed to the youth. Dawson also expressed how members of the

congregation are "committed to getting to know them relationally."[238]

5. A family-oriented congregation.

Morrow described the atmosphere of the congregation as being like a family.

"Everybody knows you; everybody's excited to see you." Morrow also works part-time

at a large Baptist Church that has an average Sunday attendance of over 1,000 people.

He contrasted the atmosphere in that large church with the atmosphere at Lakeside: "This

feeling is family oriented;" while at the large church "you're just acquaintances."[239]

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[236] "Profit & Loss Budget Overview: January through December 2003," Lakeside Fellowship ARP
Church, August 30, 2003. [Note: in some places the church uses the name "Lakeside Fellowship," but
more often it is "Lakeside Presbyterian."]

[237] Morrow interview.

[238] Dawson interview.

[239] Morrow interview.

Collier saw the advantage of the family feeling as being that "you know your youth." But Collier said it is even deeper than that. "You know their parents, you know their backgrounds. . . . You can really stay on top of what they do, where they go to school, their activities, what they like and dislike."[240] One place that family-oriented asset is manifested is on Wednesday nights. As Dawson described it, "The whole church family is here; we eat together."[241]

6. *A biblically rooted congregation.*

The first thing that Collier listed as an asset was "a very strong base of individuals that are grounded in their walk with Christ and spiritually inclined to see other people do that as well and [they] are rooted in the Scripture." He returned to this as an asset later in the interview by saying that one of the things that Lakeside does well is that the church is "very strong in its beliefs and in the spiritual lives of each of the people who are there."[242]

How did Lakeside Presbyterian identify these assets and evaluate their potential contribution?

1. *Recognizing what has successful.*

Dawson expressed that it is just a matter of looking to see what has been successful. They have not necessarily recognized their assets in advance, but have done so through evaluating why certain things have worked. He gave the example of the service project to rake leaves for an elderly woman in the church. The congregation can

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[240] Collier interview.

[241] Dawson interview.

[242] Collier interview.

recognize that this worked because the youth realize they have done something good, and the lady is appreciative. So programs like that can help the church identify its assets.[243]

2. *It has been a struggle.*

In answer to the question of how the church has identified its assets, Collier answered, "I think we struggle sometimes defining what our strengths are. . . . I don't know if we have had a real good organized assessment."[244] His comments are consistent with the discussion earlier in this paper that small churches have difficulty recognizing their assets.

How did the leadership of Lakeside Presbyterian mobilize the congregation in order to implement these assets and enable the youth to grow spiritually?

1. *Encouraging the congregation to pray for the youth.*

The congregation has been encouraged to pray for the youth. Praying has helped people become more aware of ways in which they could help. Dawson said that the congregation has been encouraged to pray for the youth generally, and they have been particularly encouraged to pray when the kids have been away in Appalachia. The church has then had the group report back to them after the mission trip.[245]

2. *Keeping the youth ministry in front of people.*

Collier explained that a key to mobilizing the congregation has been keeping the youth ministry in front of the congregation.

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[243] Dawson interview.

[244] Collier interview.

[245] Dawson interview.

Put it [what the youth are doing] in front of the congregation. Develop a program, a skit. If they go somewhere or do something, put them in front of the adults during the worship service to tell about it. . . . Put them in front of the congregation and let the congregation see that there are some positive things happening with the youth.[246]

3. Helping the congregation see results.

The example here is again the leaf-raking service project. Collier said you have

got to make sure "that people see that type of thing is happening."[247] In other words,

Collier did not think the leadership should take it for granted. Just because something has

happened does not mean that people have recognized that it happened. He spoke about

proactively helping people see the positive.

Summary of Findings

This study found 20 different assets that a small suburban church could possibly

have that could contribute to the spiritual growth of the youth in the church and in the

community. Each of the assets listed below was present in at least one of the five studied

churches.

1. A senior pastor with a vision for reaching kids.
2. Lay leadership with a vision for reaching kids.
3. A willingness to fund youth ministry.
4. A supportive congregation.
5. A young congregation with a heart for kids.
6. Uniquely qualified youth leaders.
7. A plan for developing youth leadership.
8. A loving congregation with a love for the community.
9. A physical location with enormous potential.
10. Consistent teaching.
11. Lay leadership with a vision for church revitalization.
12. A senior pastor with a vision for church revitalization.
13. Flexibility.
14. A willingness to take risks.

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[246] Collier interview.

[247] Ibid.

15. A plan for spiritual growth.
16. Lay leadership with a vision for helping kids grow.
17. Willingness to combine with and learn from other churches.
18. A supportive senior pastor.
19. A family-oriented congregation.
20. A biblically rooted congregation.

One of these 20 assets appears as an asset for all 5 studied churches: a supportive congregation. The role of the senior pastor also appears as an asset across all five studied churches, though that support is expressed in different ways in different situations. In three of the five churches, the senior pastor had a vision for reaching kids. In another case, the senior pastor had a vision for church revitalization. And in the fifth case, the senior pastor was generally supportive, although maybe not in the sense of casting a vision.

Beyond the support of the congregation, four of the five churches had as an asset a certain willingness of the congregation. In the case of two of the churches, this was expressed as a willingness to fund youth ministry. In another it was expressed as a willingness to take risks. And in the fourth, it was a willingness to combine and learn from other churches.

In three of the five churches, there was a plan in place. For two of them, it was a plan for developing youth leadership. For the third, it was an intentional plan for spiritual growth.

Lay leadership was an important asset in four of the five churches. In one it was expressed through a vision for reaching kids. In another, it was expressed through a vision for helping kids grow, which, while similar, is not quite the same as a vision for reaching kids. In the third, it was expressed through a vision for church revitalization.

And in the fourth, it was expressed through uniquely qualified lay leaders directing the

youth ministry.

This study found 14 different ways in which the studied churches identified and

evaluated the potential contribution of these assets:

1. Thinking strategically about the future.
2. The elders having a good sense of the pulse of the congregation.
3. Assessing the needs of the community and the strengths of the church.
4. Picking up ideas from other churches and evaluating how they could be used in one's own situation.
5. Listening to people.
6. The impact of studying *Experiencing God.*
7. A senior pastor who searches for assets for youth ministry.
8. Delegating the task to the youth pastor.
9. Passion and leadership.
10. Knowing the church's purpose.
11. Intentional study.
12. Experiment.
13. Recognizing what was successful.
14. Struggling to identify the assets – not being sure how to assess the church's assets.

There does not appear to be any overlap in the ways the different churches

identified and evaluated their assets.

This study found 18 different ways that the studied churches mobilized the

congregation in order to implement these assets and enable the youth to grow spiritually.

1. Making sure everyone understood the priorities.
2. Keeping youth ministry in front of people.
3. Understanding the importance of implementation, and helping people see results.
4. Understanding the balance between God's sovereignty and human responsibility.
5. Creating an environment that supports trying new things.
6. Listening.
7. Putting the right people in the right places.
8. Placing a priority on congregational ownership.
9. Seeing results.
10. Consistent teaching on the authority and responsibility of elders.
11. A desire for survival that produced a willingness to take risks.
12. The influence of a passionate lay leader.
13. Giving people in the congregation opportunities and training.

14. Casting the vision and helping the congregation see results.
15. Teaching.
16. Developing a plan and implementing the plan.
17. Encouraging the congregation to pray for youth.
18. Helping the congregation see results.

There is one phrase that appears across all five of the churches with regard to mobilization. That phrase is: seeing results. A key way a congregation is mobilized is through seeing results. In two cases it was expressed that the leadership needs to help the congregation see results. In another case, seeing the results was linked to a vision that could help define what the results should look like. In the other two cases, it was expressed simply as seeing results.

In conclusion, this study found many assets that a small suburban church can bring to the task of contributing to the spiritual growth of youth. At least twenty different assets were present in the studied churches. There does not appear to be a set formula that needs to be followed in identifying these assets and evaluating their potential contribution. These churches followed many paths to identify these assets, and in one case it was particularly a struggle to identify the assets. These churches also followed many different paths in mobilizing their congregations to implement these assets and enable the youth to grow spiritually. One thing seems to be especially important to mobilizing the congregation; making sure that the congregation "sees results."

The final chapter will consider what conclusions we can draw from this study. It will also recommend some directions for further study.

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Whole Study

The purpose of this study was to discover how five small Protestant suburban churches developed their assets to contribute to the spiritual growth of the youth in these churches and their communities. The five churches studied were chosen to represent best practice. These particular churches were chosen because someone with expertise in youth ministry who was also in a good position to observe effective youth ministries had recommended each church to me as one that has done a good job of contributing to the spiritual growth of youth.

Those who were helpful with the recommendations of churches included: four different denominational executives, three different youth ministry professors, a regional youth ministry director for a large denomination, a church camp director, Covenant Theological Seminary's own Youth in Ministry Institute, and a couple of parachurch ministries.

One difficulty in completing this study was finding people who would recommend effective small suburban churches for the study. Many of the people I contacted were of no help. Some did not even return my phone call after I had left a message explaining what I was seeking. Some of the people who were willing to help had difficulty naming small suburban churches that do a good job with youth ministry.

For example, here is an email response I received from Russ Ramsey of the Youth in

Ministry Institute:

> I am thinking about your request. I'm having a bit of difficulty coming up with a small church that does youth ministry well in a suburban community. I can think of some who have youth groups, but due to the limited resources of the churches, they are unable to hire a full-time youth pastor to really build momentum. One thing I think would be very interesting for you to ask churches about is how they do outreach—particularly with smaller churches. I have found that many smaller churches seem able to offer activities for their "covenant children," but are pretty ill-equipped for outreach ministry. I am not saying that to criticize, since I was in that spot once—a part-time intern paid to work 8 hours a week with a very small volunteer staff. Trying to cover all the bases for the "in-house" kids was tough enough. Reaching out to the community and to unbelievers is an involved thing.[1]

From the churches recommended to me, I developed a list of those that fit my

criteria. From this list I screened the churches as to their willingness to participate in the

study. I then chose five churches from those who were willing to participate, trying to

find five churches that pursued the goal of spiritual growth of youth in different ways. In

light of Ramsey's comment, I wanted to have churches that did a good job of outreach as

well as those who did a good job of ministry to their own students. Using Perry Downs'

proposal of three different dimensions in which our faith needs to grow, I wanted

churches that were good in the cognitive, emotional, and volitional dimensions of

growth.[2]

The five churches I chose for this study were:

1. **Crossroads Community Church,** located in Fishers, Indiana. Crossroads is a

   relatively new congregation of the Presbyterian Church in America. Since it only

   had a handful of youth in the congregation, Crossroads' ministry by necessity had

   to be an outreach ministry. This church is especially good at the cognitive

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[1] Russ Ramsey, "RE: Youth ministry project," e-mail to author November 28, 2001.

[2] See definitions of "spiritual growth" and of "contribute" in chapter 1 of this study.

dimension of growth, in terms of helping the students understand. It is also strong relationally, which helps students grow in the emotional dimension.

2. **Sharp Street United Methodist Church,** located in Sandy Spring, Maryland. Sharp Street is the oldest African-American congregation in Montgomery County, Maryland. While it is a church that is good at outreach, the strength of its ministry is connecting its own students with the church and developing student leaders. While not neglecting the cognitive dimension, Sharp Street is good at the emotional and volitional dimensions of growth.

3. **Cornerstone Evangelical Presbyterian Church,** located in Katy, Texas, is a church that has managed to transform itself over the past 10-12 years. The church changed from a dying, older congregation, to a vibrant younger congregation that now has an increasing desire for children's ministries. This church is good at outreach and developing student leaders. It has a plan to develop all three dimensions of growth, but probably is best at the emotional and volitional dimensions.

4. **Rogers Memorial Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church,** located in Rock Hill, South Carolina, is a church where church revitalization and the development of an evangelistic youth ministry worked together. The two efforts were mutually reinforcing. Rogers also has a plan to develop all three dimensions of growth, but I think it is probably best at the volitional.

5. **Lakeside Presbyterian Church,** located in the Lake Norman area of Mooresville, North Carolina, is a congregation of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. Lakeside is a church that is much better at reaching its own

students than it is at outreach. This church illustrates the difficulty that Ramsey

was highlighting in the quote above. The key factor in Lakeside's youth ministry

is an annual mission trip to Appalachia. The church is a strong teaching church,

so it does well with the cognitive dimension of growth, but the mission trip also

helps develop the emotional and volitional dimensions of growth.

Once I had identified the five churches to study, I researched those churches over

a period of a year and a half. I studied them through interviews and focus groups,

through personal observation, and through document analysis. In the study of each

church I sought to answer three primary research questions:

1) What assets did the studied churches have that contributed to the spiritual growth
of the youth in the church and in the community?

2) How did these churches identify and evaluate the potential contribution of these
assets?

3) How did the leadership of these churches mobilize their congregations in order to
implement these assets and enable the youth to grow spiritually?

Discussion of Findings

In light of the difficulty that the people I asked to recommend churches to me had

in identifying small suburban churches that do youth ministry well, I think the chief

finding of this study is that *there are* small suburban churches that do a good job of

contributing the spiritual growth of youth. These churches are able to do this not only

with the students they already have in the church, but they are also able to develop

effective outreach efforts to those students outside the church who are in the community.

In fact, three of the studied churches especially targeted those students in the community

who were outside the church. Those churches that especially targeted students in the community were: Crossroads, Cornerstone, and Rogers Memorial.

Related to the fact that there are small suburban churches that do a good job of contributing to the spiritual growth of youth is the fact that there are a significant number of assets that a small suburban church could potentially bring to the task. This study discovered 20 different assets that were assets of at least one of the studied churches for contributing to the spiritual growth of youth.[3] As we saw in the literature review in chapter 2, small churches struggle with problems of self-image, and often do not recognize the assets that they have. This is particularly true in youth ministry, where the prevailing models of ministry are potentially biased towards large churches and large youth ministries. This study brings hope to the small suburban church because it shows that a small church could have considerable assets.

One asset that appeared in all five of the studied churches was that of a supportive congregation. This support was manifested in different ways in each of the five churches, but it usually included both financial support and personal involvement. In many cases, members of the congregation made special efforts to get to know the students in the church. In the case of Rogers Memorial, a large percentage of the congregation became volunteers in the youth ministry. This congregational support is crucial to a small church, because relationships are theoretically one of the strengths of small churches, as seen in the literature review in chapter 2.

The senior pastor was also an asset in all five of the studied churches. This indicates that support from the pastor may be a critical component for small suburban churches to achieve excellence in contributing to the spiritual growth of youth.

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[3] See list of assets under "Summary of Findings" section of chapter 4 of this study.

The pastor's involvement was different in each case. In three of the cases, the pastor was the chief visionary in setting the church on a course for excellence in youth ministry. The three cases where the pastor was the key visionary were: Crossroads, Sharp Street and Cornerstone. At Rogers Memorial, the church went through a pastoral change, and was even without a pastor during some of the time of development. Yet, the two pastors who were there for part of the time each contributed significantly to the vision. At Lakeside, the pastor did not appear so much in a visionary role as in a support role, but he was especially supportive to the youth pastor.

One thing that people potentially overestimate is the importance of having a youth pastor present. The mere presence of a youth pastor did not appear to be an indicator of excellence in the studied churches. Sharp Street did not have a youth pastor, although they had uniquely qualified volunteer youth leaders. Reading the summary of Sharp Street could help small suburban churches think outside of accepted stereotypes as to where to look for youth leaders. Another studied church, Cornerstone, did not thrive under the first full-time youth pastor that they hired. The ministry did not develop into what it is today until the arrival of Brian Land as youth pastor. This suggests that it is not the mere presence of a youth pastor that matters, but rather getting a youth pastor who is a good match for the situation; the right person at the right place at the right time. Another church in the study, Rogers Memorial, went through a series of youth pastors, and finally decided it was good not to have one. At Lakeside, the youth pastor arrived when the youth group was going through transition due to graduation. The impact of having a youth pastor is yet to be determined at that church. Only in the case of

Crossroads did the presence of the first hired youth pastor make an immediate difference in the vitality of the youth ministry.

While the presence of the youth pastor was not necessarily a determining factor of the effectiveness of the youth ministry, what was an essential asset at each of the studied churches was someone to be an advocate and to cast vision for what the youth ministry could become. As stated earlier, in three of the studied churches the senior pastor filled that role. In the other two, key laymen stepped into the role. The two churches where lay leaders were the chief advocates and visionaries were: Rogers Memorial and Lakeside.

There is one thing that did not happen in any of the studied churches. None of the pastors of these churches took on the added role of youth pastor. Even when the senior pastor was a former youth pastor who still had a heart for kids, as in the case of Scott Dean at Crossroads, the pastor realized that it was not possible to do justice to both roles if the pastor tried to do both.

While not specifically listed as an asset, an important characteristic that appeared in all five of these churches was a willingness to change. The change did not always come easily, and sometimes it was initially opposed, as at Rogers Memorial. But in the end, each of these churches was willing to make significant changes in order to develop a ministry for contributing to the spiritual growth of youth.

Some of these changes involved the way assets were allocated. Each of the churches had limited resources, as can be expected in a small church. But they were willing to change the allocation of resources to direct more toward the ministry to youth–to make youth ministry a priority. In two of the cases, that reallocation of resources was a radical change. Those two cases were Rogers Memorial and Cornerstone. But with the

reallocation of resources came new resources that had not been there before, for example the Catawba Indians providing a 38,000 square foot facility for The PointE at Rogers Memorial. However, it is possible to step out in faith too far, and to over-extend your resources, as in the case of Cornerstone. Cornerstone ultimately had to start cutting back, and start considering how to reallocate resources so they could devote more to children's ministry.

There was no observable overlap in how the five churches identified assets and evaluated their potential contribution. They all discovered them in different ways. The summary of findings at the end of chapter 4 lists 14 different ways that these churches identified and evaluated their assets. This indicates that there is not a specific formula that churches should follow. It varies by situation. This list can help the reader think through what would be the most helpful way to discover the assets in his or her own situation.

There are 18 different ways that these churches mobilized the congregation to implement these assets. There are lots of different tools that church leaders can employ to help mobilize the congregation. It is clear from this study that it helps if the congregation can see results. Sometimes the leadership needs to help the congregation see the results. Once the congregation recognizes some initial results, then it is easier to get the congregation to take the next step.

A couple of other things from this study are noteworthy for someone seeking to develop a youth ministry in a small suburban church setting. For two of the studied churches, a mission trip was significant in helping the group develop. These two were Cornerstone and Lakeside. Two of the churches also had an unusually large class of

students pass through the ministry. This helped things develop while that class of students was there, but it created a void when they graduated. These two churches were also Cornerstone and Lakeside. Four of the churches experienced notable providential factors beyond the churches' direct control that played a role in the development of the ministry: the first three students being catalysts for inviting others at Crossroads; a new high school making the core at Cornerstone essentially seniors for three years; space provided by the Catawba Indians for Rogers Memorial; and a pro basketball son buying a house that brought the present youth leaders to Sharp Street. This indicates that not everything can be planned. Ministry development is a balance between Divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

Recommendations for Further Research and Practice

Hopefully this study will help to establish the category of small suburban church as a valid one for further study. Not only is there not much written about small suburban churches, but the subject also barely registers as a category for discussion. This study indicates that there are probably a large number of churches in this category, and some of these churches do youth ministry well. I have just taken a new position this past July as director of Outreach North America, the home missions agency of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. At Outreach North America I am discovering that maybe as many as half of our denomination's churches are small suburban churches. Yet we do not presently have a way to identify who these churches are. We need to create a way to identify these churches. We need this to become a category that we measure. We need desperately to research and better understand the assets these churches have and the challenges they face.

This study has discovered 20 different assets that small suburban churches could have for contributing to the spiritual growth of youth. The assets that have been discovered in these churches could be used for a quantitative study measuring which assets are most prevalent in small suburban churches. This would advance our understanding of the small suburban church category.

It is interesting that three of these churches are going through transition in their ministry. Cornerstone is going through a major transition, with the youth pastor having already left and the senior pastor having expressed his intention to leave. The question is: What happens to the youth ministry when new people move into these positions? Lakeside is trying to figure out how to rebuild the numbers in the group after a large graduating class. Will the numbers be rebuilt, or is this a time in the church's lifecycle when it needs to concentrate on ministering well to the students who are there? And while it did not come out in the case summary, Crossroads is going through a transition where the most significant group in the youth ministry is becoming the junior high students. The senior high students who helped get the ministry started now all have their driver's licenses, and they have many competing activities that are taking away some of the energy from the senior high group.[4] How will the church handle these kinds of transitions? Crossroads is also facing the transition into their first building in the near future. How will that impact the youth ministry? A follow-up study of these same five churches about five years from now would be extremely helpful. It would help with questions regarding the sustainability of youth ministry in small suburban churches, and with questions about how small suburban churches handle transitions.

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[4] Keith Doane, telephone interview, November 19, 2004.

As discussed at the end of chapter 2, spiritual growth is difficult to measure directly. We do not truly know the outcome of our efforts to help youth grow until years later, when we see what kind of adults they become. I suggested then that a longitudinal study would be a fruitful field for further research. I will now suggest that one potentially helpful longitudinal study would be to study the youth who have come through these five churches, a study of where they are, what they are doing, and what their relationship with the Lord is like five, ten, or fifteen years after graduation.

Concerning suggestions for further practice, there is a wealth of information here for the leaders of small suburban churches and for parents who are considering a small suburban church. These five churches are all amazingly different. Even though four of the churches come from the Presbyterian family tree, the churches are different in the age of the church and in the approach they have taken to ministry. Because of these differences, there is likely to be at least one of the churches that will share something in common with the situation of the reader. I would suggest studying all five churches presented here, and then narrowing your focus to the one that is most like your situation. Consider this an opportunity to learn from the experience of others.

Also worth one's investment of time would be to reflect on the list of ways the studied churches mobilized their congregations to implement these assets. It is just as reasonable to suppose that every church has its own unique mix of assets as it is to maintain that each Christian has a unique mix of spiritual gifts. As individuals, the important thing is to not just know that we have gifts, but also to use them. So with churches the important thing is not just to know that we have assets, but to learn to

recognize these assets, to understand the contribution they can make, and then to

implement them.

APPENDIX
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Questions to Ask

- ❑ How would you define youth ministry?

- ❑ How has the youth ministry here developed?

- ❑ What all does the church do that you consider to be part of youth ministry?

- ❑ What strengths, or assets, does this church have for helping youth grow

  spiritually?

- ❑ Who are the youth you serve?

- ❑ How has the church identified its strengths in reaching youth?

- ❑ Who have been the key people in developing the youth ministry?

- ❑ How have these people had an impact on youth?

- ❑ How has the whole congregation been involved?

- ❑ How was the congregation encouraged to support what the church is doing with

  youth?

Topics to Cover

- ❑ Historical development of the youth ministry from the interviewee's perspective.

- ❑ Effectiveness of the ministry from the interviewee's perspective.

- ❑ Key components of the ministry from the interviewee's perspective.

- ❑ Evaluation of the congregation's support from the interviewee's perspective.

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