



YOUTH & CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

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For
Effective Ministry

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RESEARCH PAPER YOUTH and CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

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- A Brief Note On the Following Research Material –

The following research paper is the result of a core literature review of more than 70 books, articles, blogs and websites in the area of youth and children’s ministry, primarily sourced from Australia, England and North America. Statistical data documented in the paper was drawn from a number of sources both secular and Christian, including NCLS, ABS, McCrindle Research, the Barna Group and the United Nations Statistics Division. The findings of the paper were also confirmed and complemented by an extensive field study questionnaire conducted with 22 Youth and Children’s Ministers across all metropolitan regions here in Sydney, as well as conducting a number of personal interviews with three senior experts and trainers in the field. For consistency of analysis and approach, the field questionnaire was specifically designed to correlate with the research framework used in the literature review.

This paper is by no means designed to be an exhaustive analysis of the subject under question but has been deliberately kept concise for the purposes of the project.

Note: In many instances the information provided in the footnotes is as significant as the main text for fleshing out some of the detail referred to within the material.

RESEARCH PAPER - YOUTH and CHILDREN'S MINISTRY -

"Given the seeming importance of retaining youth for most religious groups...it is striking how haphazardly most congregations go about it" ¹

"Without a clear idea of our philosophy we could easily get bedazzled by whatever the latest and greatest youth ministry model from America happens to be.

And there are youth ministry models from America and elsewhere that look impressive.

You might see diagrams of funnels, baseball diamonds or bulls-eyes. You might hear code words like

"seeker sensitive", rage 'n' praise, awesome, fuel, pulse, nrg, and so on, which all sound impressive.

Then again, they could also be well-presented frontages for what are pretty normal youth ministry practices.

Notice I say normal, not necessarily biblical, nor even effective in the long run" ²

"The most important function of youth ministry is longevity. Long-term discipleship...

Following Jesus is hard. Faith is difficult. Discipleship requires a huge investment of time.

Most of us don't have the time. Or we choose not to take the time.

Or our current models of ministry don't allow us the time" ³

(A) IDENTIFYING THE ISSUES: WHAT THE DATA IS TELLING US:

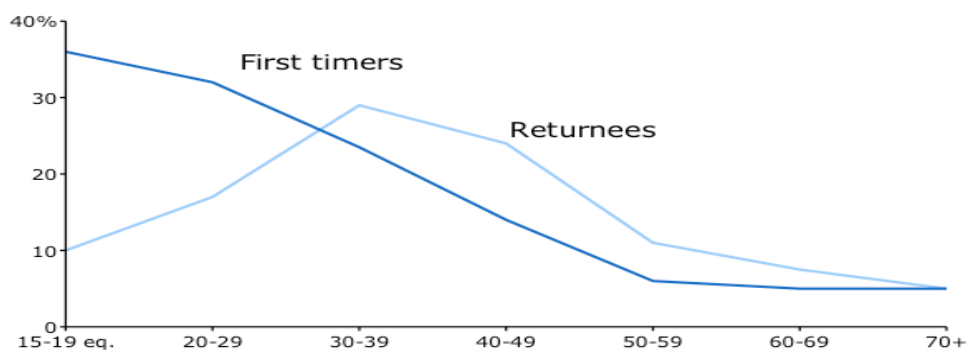
1. There's a strategic opportunity on our doorstep:

1.1. The need is enormous:

Australian Bureau of Statistics figures (2010) has 19.5% of Sydney's population as 0-14, with current estimates of 4.6 million people in total (with about 900,000 young people in this city).⁴ Comparatively therefore, our youth ministries are barely scratching the surface.

1.2. Youth are strategic to congregational growth and scale:

a: Youth is where the largest number of 'first timers' arrive:⁵



¹ Dr. K.E. Powell and Dr. C. Clark: Sticky Faith: (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011) p.27.

² Scott Petty: The Playbook: 'A Practical Manual for Youth Ministry' (as yet unpublished) p.5.

³ Mike Yaconelli (Youthworker Journal, May/June 2003).

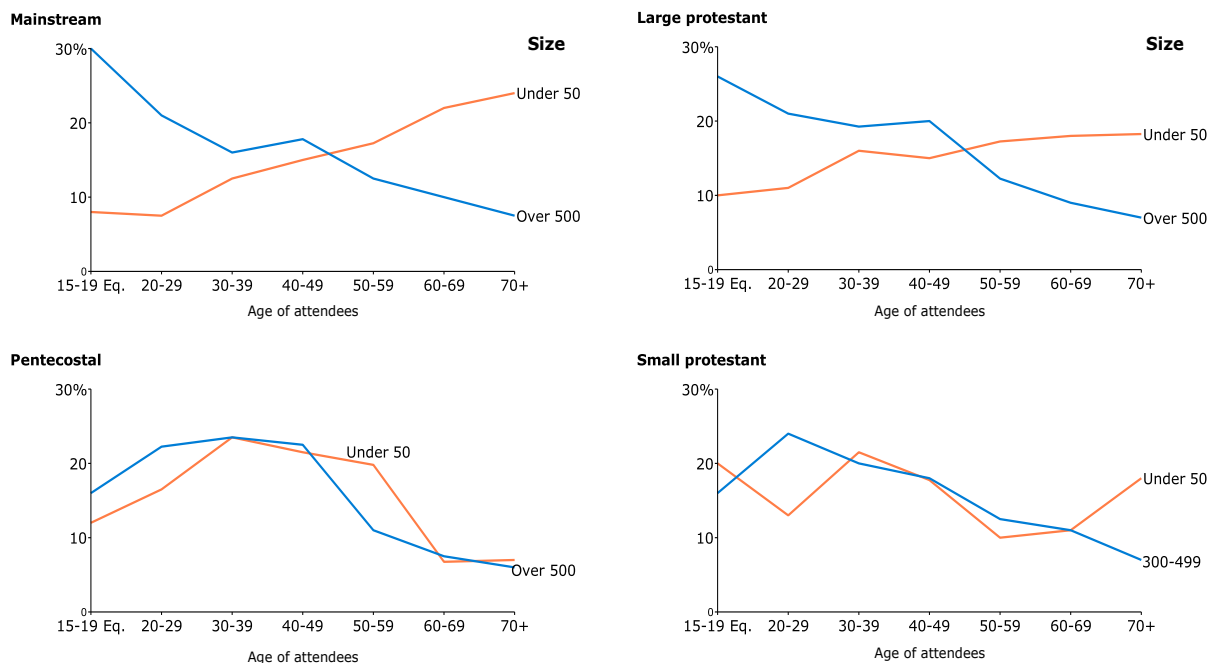
⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics:

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/3218.0~20101~Main+Features~Main+Features?OpenDocument#PARALINK1>

⁵ Winds of Change: NCLS91, p.216.

b: Youth participation appears linked to congregational size and growth: ⁶

And youth participation appears to be fundamental to achieving large congregations in all denominations; Pentecostals seem to have a particularly strong appeal for 20 to 40 year olds many of whom are ex Anglican Sunday School kids



Source: NCLS91 Winds of change p305, exceeds 100% based on optical adjustment in 15-19 year olds

1.3. The most common age people become Christian is prior to 20:

*"Social scientists have known for years that the moral foundations of children are generally determined by the time the individual reaches age nine. ... Anyone who wishes to have significant influence on the development of a person's moral and spiritual foundations had better exert that influence while the person is still [young]."*⁷

Within our local context, the number of Anglicans and Protestants indicating they became Christian under 5 years was (23%), with proportions for the next three age groups being roughly the same: 5-9 years (16%), 10-14 years (18%) and 15-19 years (16%).⁸

Interestingly, Barna's book: *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions: Why Children Should be your Church's #1 Priority*, reveals that 93% of young people in the US consider themselves to be Christian by age 13, but the majority exhibit no grace based relationship with Christ, with only 3% holding a biblical worldview.⁹

According to Barna, fuelling the problem is the focus the church gives to older children without understanding the critical importance of developing a young child's biblical worldview from the earliest years of life, resulting in a lack of strategic focus on reaching children with the gospel.

The significance of focusing on the development of children is underscored by findings showing that the moral foundations of children are typically solidified by the age of nine, that lifelong spiritual choices regarding one's faith and one's relationship with Jesus Christ are generally made before they reach age 13, and that a person's religious beliefs are usually worked out prior to becoming a teenager and, that those

⁶ Winds of Change: NCLS91, p305.

⁷ George Barna: *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions: Why Children Should be your Church's #1 Priority* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2003) p.47.

⁸ *Building Church: Mission Under The Microscope*: NCLS: 1991 p.121.

⁹ *Transforming*: p.33 & 37.

beliefs rarely change to any meaningful degree after age 13.¹⁰

Therefore Barna believes children should be the primary focus of our ministry (particularly age 5-12), believing that if we impart to young children a strong faith we diminish the likelihood of problems that later plague the teenage years. Barna also believes that it's absolutely critical that churches work in *mutual partnership* with parents, equipping them to teach and nurture their children in a biblical worldview.¹¹

1.4. Youth/adolescent period is lasting longer:

“A century ago when people turned 15 or 16 they moved from childhood into adulthood. With that came the responsibilities of work and financial obligations. As expectations and opportunities grew in the 20th century, so the life stages changed... Today children are “older” younger, being more technology savvy, media saturated and information empowered. Yet adulthood has been further delayed as the years of adolescence are extended. Today’s live-at-home 20-somethings have been labeled the KIPPERS (Kids in Parents Pockets Eroding Retirement Savings)¹²

Research indicates that the period classified as ‘youth’ has extended and children are remaining dependent on their parents longer.¹³

- * Nearly 1 in 4 (23%) people aged 20-34 continue to live in the parental home (8% aged 30-40). In Sydney and Melbourne, the figure is even higher (27%).
- * Statistics indicate that many are returning home only to boomerang back again. Of those aged 25-29 living in the parental home, more than half (54%) have moved out then returned. Most (52%) last less than 2 years, with 20% lasting less than 1 year, out of the home.
- * Males in this age group are more likely than females to be living with their parents (27% vs. 18%)
- * We are also seeing the emergence of a ‘multigenerational’ household where older parents are moving in with their adult children, or adult children returning to the parental home with their own children.

It raises the question: How might youth ‘extension’ statistics impact current ministry approaches and methodologies:¹⁴

¹⁰ Exit interviews with teenagers revealed that the spiritual foundation laid by families and churches when they were younger is often inadequate. (E.g. Comparatively few early teens indicated they learned enough Bible content to enable them to make important life decisions on the basis of biblical principles. Further, most teenagers have already made up their minds that once they become independent of their parents they will abandon church.) *‘Spiritual Progress Hard to Find’*: Barna Research (December 22nd, 2003) <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/132-spiritual-progress-hard-to-find-in-2003>

¹¹ Transforming: p.14.

¹² Mark McCrindle: McCrindle Research: *‘Downagers, and the Boomerang Kids’*: 2009.

<http://www.mccrindle.com.au/ResearchSummaries/Generation-Y-Casuals-Downagers-Boomerang-Kids.pdf>.

See also *‘First Generation Z’s Face Their Final Exams’*: 2012.

http://www.mccrindle.com.au/SocialAnalysis/2012/Gen-Zs-Sit-Final-Exams-2012_McCrindle-Research.pdf

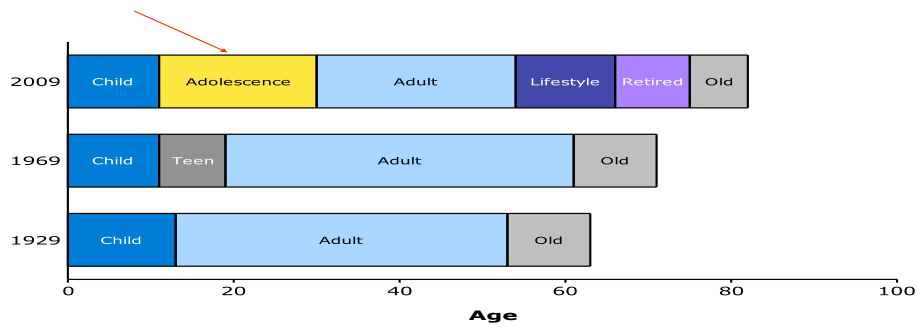
And... *‘Australia Street’*: Nov 13, 2012.

http://blog.mccrindle.com.au/_blog/The_McCrindle_Blog/post/Welcome_to_Australia_Street_VIDEO_INFOGRAPHIC/

¹³ For Boomers, the most common reason for leaving the parental home was to get married. For today’s 20-somethings, the main reason is to be independent, followed by a relationship. Additionally, study and employment rated in the top 4 reasons. McCrindle Research: *‘Downagers, and the Boomerang Kids’*.

¹⁴ United Nations Statistics Division Data: KPMG

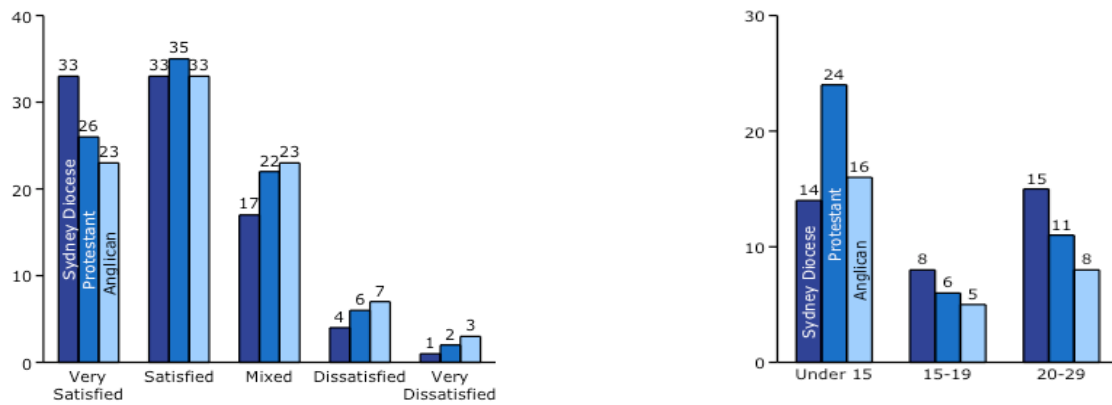
The social structures of youth now continue until the age of 30; this is an opportunity to extend a successful part of the current ministry



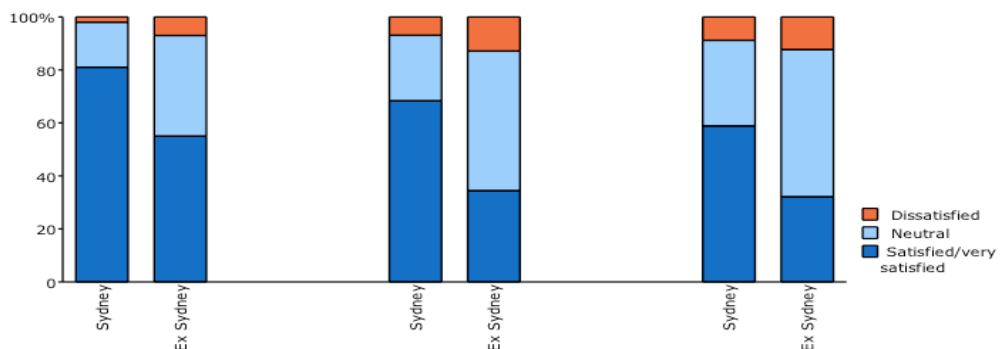
Source: United Nations Statistics Division data; KPMG

2. Anglicans have some leverage over the rest:

2.1. Data indicates we 'do' youth ministry well in Sydney compared to other Diocese: ¹⁵



2.2. The quality of our children's and youth programs the core reason: ¹⁶



2.3. Youth ministry now rivals church services in spiritual formation:

NCLS research found that youth ministry has grown in importance over the years to the point where it rivals church services in terms of importance in the spiritual formation of attendees. ¹⁷

¹⁵ NCLS: Build My Church:

¹⁶ Church Life Profile: NCLS: 2006: p. 20. (Adjusted for no response)

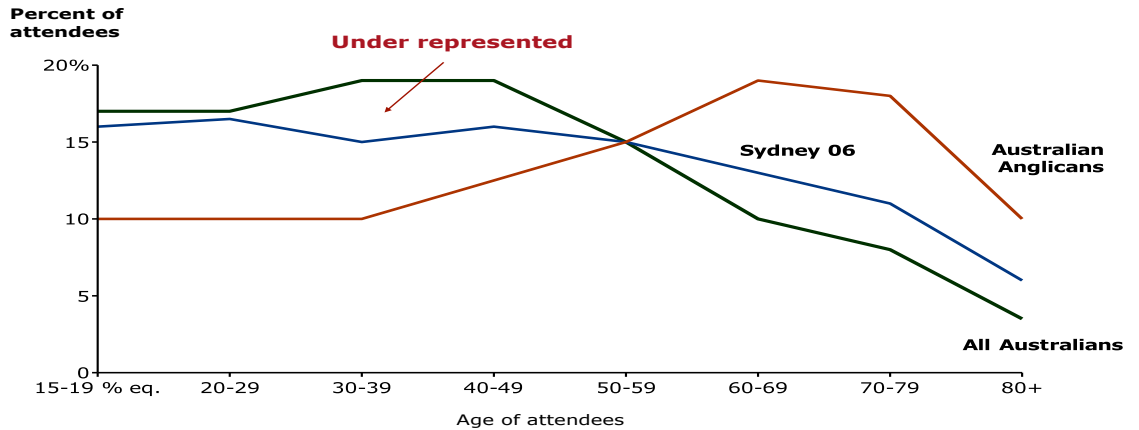
¹⁷ Where To From Here: 2011, p.4

3. We could be doing better:

3.1. Sydney Diocese under-represented among young adults:

Compared to the wider population demographics, Sydney Diocese is under-represented among young adults (aged 20-30).¹⁸

The Sydney Diocesan age profile is distinctly different from the rest of the Anglican movement; Sydney remains underrepresented in the 20 to 50 year old age group but shows a solid presence among 15 to 19 year olds



Source: Church life profile p23 NCLS06, exceeds 100% based on optical adjustment to 15-19 year olds, ABS and Census data

3.2. Youth loss and disengagement: we lose ground once youth hit their 20's:

*“The ages eighteen to twenty-nine are the black hole of church attendance; this age segment is “missing in action” from most congregations”*¹⁹

NCLS research indicates that there’s an attendance dip of congregation members between **20-40** yrs., as well as a high drop out rate post school:²⁰

Dropout Rate	Secondary / Post School	Left Home
Anglican	33%	43%
Lutheran	13%	19%
Reformed	5%	13%
Adventist	9%	29%
Baptist	20%	32%
Presbyterian	29%	33%
Uniting	37%	45%
Methodist	8%	29%

Interestingly, one study conducted in the United States discovered similar concerns, with some interesting conclusions:²¹

¹⁸ Church Life Profile: 2006.p.23, exceeds 100% based on optical adjustment to 15-19 year olds, ABS and Census data.

¹⁹ David Kinnaman: You Lost Me: ‘Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church... And Rethinking Faith’: (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011) p.22.

²⁰ Church Life Profile: NCLS: 2006 p.20, 23, and Building Church: Mission Under The Microscope: NCLS: 1991 p.121.

²¹ Dr. K.E. Powell & Dr. C. Clark: Sticky Faith: (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011) p.16.

According to their research, between 40 - 50% of high school students graduating from church or youth group will fail to stick with their faith in college. Of the 50%, 80% never planned to.²²

In an attempt to stem the tide, the 'Fuller Youth Institute' (FYI) conducted the '*College Transition Project*' in efforts to identify the relationships and best practices that might better set youth on a trajectory of lifelong faith and service i.e.

*"To better understand the dynamics of youth group graduates' transition to college, and to pinpoint the steps that leaders, churches, parents, and seniors themselves can take to help students stay on the Sticky Faith path".*²³

Some of the statistical data found the following to be true:

- * Kids who left the faith report having questions about faith in early adolescence that were *ignored by significant adults* (parents, pastor, teacher).²⁴
- * A factor causing kids to shelve their faith is the *segregation of kids and adults in church*. Kids who attend church-wide services are more likely to keep their faith.²⁵
- * Students who *serve* and build relationships with *younger children* the more likely they are to hang on to their faith.²⁶
- * Students who feel the freedom and have opportunities to *express their doubts* tend to have more sticky faith. (But less than half of those surveyed shared their doubts and struggles with adults or friends).²⁷
- * Short-term mission trips seem to have *little impact* on the lasting faith of young people (they are not more likely to give to the poor or become long-term missionaries).²⁸
- * The more students feel *prepared for college* the more likely their faith is to grow.²⁹

In yet a further study focusing on Protestant 18-29yr olds, this time conducted by the Barna Group (and explored in David Kinamman's -*You Lost Me: Why Young Christian's are Leaving the Church*) found the following:³⁰

61% - of those with Christian background reported having dropped out after going regularly

²² Important to note in this research is that those in the sample taken tended to have higher grade-point averages, were more likely to come from in-tact families & from churches that had f/t youth pastors. Also important to note is the drop out rate for college & non-college students was not significantly different. Sticky Faith: p.16.

²³ Having said that, the authors believe that there's no one sticky faith bullet, there's no single reason why kids leave, and no single reason that will make them stay. They believe that young people are complex and their faith is influenced by a host of factors. The core of building a 'sticky faith' is helping kids to develop clear and honest understandings of the gospel and biblical faith. As kids are lead into an awareness of their significant role in the kingdom of God demonstrated through scripture, they would then have the best chance of discovering a faith that is compelling and life giving. Sticky Faith: p.18.

²⁴ Sticky Faith: p.72.

²⁵ Sticky Faith: p.97.

²⁶ Sticky Faith: p.98.

²⁷ Sticky Faith: p.73.

²⁸ Sticky Faith: p.129.

²⁹ Sticky Faith: p.151.

³⁰ Note: this research data came from individuals who identified as Christian before the age of 18. Kinnaman describes this age group as the 'black hole' of church attendance, as 'missing in action' from most congregations. The problem is not that this generation has been less churched than those before them; the problem is that much spiritual energy fades away during a crucial decade of life –the twenties. Kinnaman outlines 3 general patterns in those that drop out of the church, he labels each using 3 broad terms: '*Nomads*' - those who walk away from church engagement but still consider themselves Christians. '*Prodigals*' - lose their faith, describing themselves as "no longer Christian" and '*Exiles*' – those that are still invested in their Christian faith but feel stuck (or lost) between culture and church. Kinnaman notes that the majority of these dropouts are not walking away from the faith, but putting involvement in the church on hold. That 'prodigals' are rarest of the dropouts; most are either 'nomads' or 'exiles'. Most young Christians are struggling *less* with their faith in Christ than with their *experience of church*. Lost: p. 22-27. A summary of the Barna data research can be found here: <http://www.youlostmebook.org/>

- 58% - said they are less active in the church than they were at 15
- 41% - said they have gone through significant 'doubts' in their faith
- 35% - describe a period they felt like rejecting their parents' faith

Interestingly, there also appeared to be a countertrend:

- 42% - said they're very concerned about their generation leaving the church
- 41% - describe a desire for "more traditional faith, rather than a hip version of Christianity"
- 30% - said they're "more excited about church than at any time in their life"³¹

From research data and individual interviews David Kinnaman proceeded to outline 6 core 'themes' to describe reasons youth today have shifted away from the church (and for some, the Christian faith).³²

The six 'themes' posited were: That the church is...

1. *Overprotective and unwelcoming of creativity and involvement in culture*³³
2. *Shallow in its teaching*
3. *Anti-science*
4. *Repressive- particularly in regard to sex*³⁴
5. *Exclusive in a way that conflicts with the open-mindedness, tolerance and acceptance of the surrounding culture*
6. *Doesn't allow the expression of doubt*

Kinnaman believes that what we ultimately discover is:

*"The Christian church...has a shallow faith problem because we have a discipleship problem. Moreover, diagnosing and treating shallow faith among young adults is urgent because we have a shallow faith problem among all adults."*³⁵

This diagnosis that current youth drop out rates are closely linked to the issue of shallow faith is strongly underlined in Brian Cosby's - 'Giving Up The Gimmicks: Reclaiming Youth Ministry From an Entertainment Culture'. Cosby proposes that one of the reasons teenagers are leaving the church, purposeless and disillusioned with the gimmicks is because they've not been adequately nurtured and established in the faith.

Cosby notes that we've locked into entertainment driven models of youth ministry, and by numbers driven church-growth success where we've often become more concerned about numbers than spiritual depth. The consequences are - high youth drop out post high school, as well as a spiritually and theologically shallow worldview amongst our teenagers. We've left teenagers hungering for meaningful answers to life's questions and youth leaders burnt out and dissatisfied with ministry.³⁶

Like Cosby, Kinnaman believes this drop out problem is, at its core, a faith-development problem i.e. a *disciple-making* problem, that these ministry shortcomings are indicators of significant 'gaps' in *disciple-*

³¹ Lost: p.27.

³² Kinnaman found there was no single reason that young adults disconnect from the church, but a wide range of perspectives, frustrations, and disillusionments that compel the disconnection. The research findings were compiled into 6 themes that best captured the overall 'drop out' phenomenon. Lost: p.92.

³³ Kinnaman found that 'helicopter parenting' and the overall cultural fixation on 'safety and protectiveness' is having a profound effect on the church's ability to disciple the next generation. Kinnaman notes that this overprotectiveness can lead youth to look for excitement outside traditional boundaries e.g. sex, drugs, thrill seeking etc. or other forms of spirituality. Lost: p.98.

³⁴ Kinnaman notes that many youth today are skeptical about the reliability of the original biblical manuscripts; reading the Bible through a lens of pluralism and are less likely to believe the scriptures have a claim on human obedience. Lost: p. 31 & 52. From their research, the authors of *Sticky Faith* discovered that more than 2/3rds of those surveyed would say that being a Christian was all about 'doing' the faith e.g. loving others or following Jesus' example (more than 1/3rd did not even mention Jesus) and about 'sin management' i.e. do go to church, don't do drink, drugs, sex etc. *Sticky Faith*: p.33.

³⁵ Lost: p.120.

³⁶ In response, Cosby believes there needs to be a counter to current entertainment and moralistic driven models of youth ministry. The church must reclaim the ground of Christ-centered gospel focussed, 'means of grace' youth ministry. Brian H. Cosby: *Giving Up the Gimmicks: Reclaiming Youth Ministry from an Entertainment Culture* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2012). P. 17f.

making, and in particular, there are 3 critical areas where these gaps are in evidence, and where the church now has a God-given opportunity to rethink its approach to disciple-making: ³⁷

1. In the area of *relationships* - the church needs to reconsider *how* we make disciples
2. In rediscovering Christian *calling* and *vocation* ³⁸
3. In reprioritizing *wisdom* over *information* - as we help teenagers seek to know God ³⁹

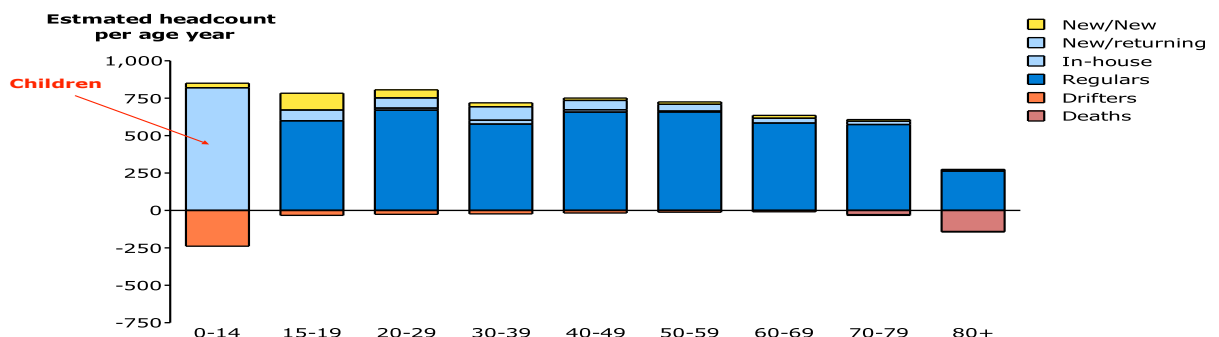
Kinnaman recommends that older Christians, parents, peers, church leaders and organizations must now ‘*corporately*’ respond to these concerns by finding more effective means of ‘*personal disciple making*’ and by the recovery of ‘*genuine relationships*’ within the body of Christ. ⁴⁰

Kinnaman believes the recovery of *genuine relationships* is central to disciple-making, without returning to relational disciple-making as its focus, the current Church will not adequately prepare the next generation to follow Christ faithfully in a rapidly changing culture:

“Taking our cues from public education, among other sectors of society, we have created a conveyor belt of development that industrializes the soul formation of young people - who eventually become adults with inch-deep, mile-wide faith. The outcome is adult Christians who were not transformed by their faith as children, as teens, or as young adults. How can we expect more after they turn forty?... Some are tempted to believe that spiritual effectiveness is connected to the size of our institutions and the sophistication of our content, but nothing could be further from the truth...does this infrastructure yield more and better discipleship automatically? Our research says no.” ⁴¹

3.3. ‘Churn’ is of concern: ⁴²

Detailed analysis of the flow of members by age shows that most additions are the children of members; some leave in their teens but most return later with their children; there is little evidence of significant new additions among the adult population



Sources: NCLS profiles 2001,2006; Why people don't go to church p23;DYB p144

³⁷ Lost: p.28-30.

³⁸ Kinnaman believes we need to help youth connect spiritual wisdom with real world knowledge, that we make little effort to help disciples connect the dots between their vocation and their faith, not only in the area of science and education etc. but especially so in the creative arena (music, art, film, writing etc.) p.30, 127.

³⁹ Lost: p.201.

⁴⁰ Kinnaman's analysis argues that blame for the current youth crisis cannot be laid exclusively on any one group of people, neither will the solution come from the efforts of only one group...“*Relationships grow out of conversations and conversations need more than one voice.*” Interestingly, Kinnaman lists ‘organizations’ (i.e. publishers, schools, businessmen, churches, ministry organizations) as important influence stakeholders in this process. Lost: p.35.

⁴¹ Kinnaman's conviction is that in order to address this issue the Christian community must rethink its efforts to make disciples. Kinnaman believes that we've built our work with young people on a method rooted in modern, mechanistic, and mass production paradigms, but disciples cannot be mass-produced, disciples must be handmade, one relationship at a time. What's now needed, are new architects to design *interconnected approaches to faith transference*, a renewal of catechisms and confirmation, and to recognize that here, we have both individual responsibility and an institutional opportunity. Lost: p.12-13, 119-121.

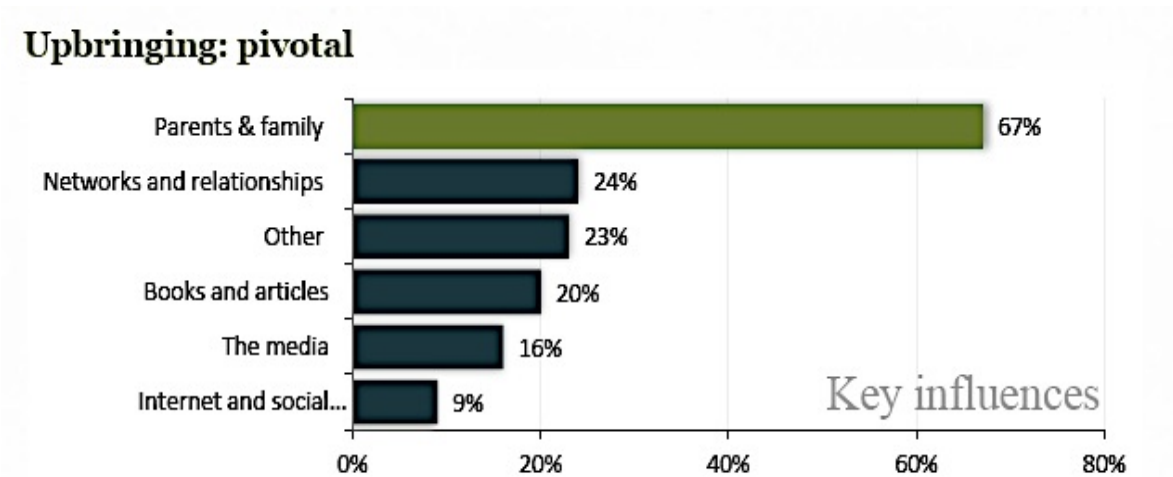
⁴² EEMug: 3.0, p.28.

3.4. Christian parents increasingly outsourcing spiritual instruction to the church:

“Research discovered that tens of millions of parents are satisfied by simply enrolling their children in church programs; they demonstrate little concern about the quality or effectiveness of those experiences”⁴³

“When a church intentionally or not, assumes a family’s responsibility in the area of spiritually nurturing children, it fosters an unhealthy dependence upon the church to relieve the family of its biblical responsibility”⁴⁴

The Australian Communities Report findings indicated that upbringing was pivotal in shaping a child’s spiritual beliefs, with 2 in 3 (67%) noting the strong influence of parents and families on formatively shaping their adult religious beliefs.⁴⁵



There were also telling findings on parental church involvement across denominations, with Lutheran and Salvation Army scoring highest for involvement of both parents in church life.⁴⁶

	Both Parents	Father	Mother	Occasional	Neither	Don't Know
Overall	45%	2%	16%	12%	23%	2%
Anglican	39%	2%	20%	13%	24%	2%
Assemblies of God	30%	2%	13%	12%	36%	6%
Baptist	48%	1%	12%	10%	29%	1%
Churches of Christ	45%	2%	15%	6%	30%	2%
Lutheran	72%	1%	8%	8%	10%	1%
Presbyterian	40%	2%	18%	13%	26%	2%
Salvation Army	52%	2%	10%	7%	25%	4%
Uniting	49%	2%	19%	13%	16%	2%

⁴³ Several Barna studies pointed out that most Christian churches evaluate success in terms of program attendance, child satisfaction and parental satisfaction, but do little to examine individual spiritual advancement. However, the ministries having the greatest success at seeing young people emerge into mature Christians, rather than contented church-goers, are those that facilitate a parent-church partnership focused on instilling specific spiritual beliefs and practices in a child’s life from a very early age. Sadly, less than one out of every five churches has produced such a ministry. *‘Spiritual Progress Hard to Find’*: Barna Research (December, 22nd, 2003) <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/132-spiritual-progress-hard-to-find-in-2003>

⁴⁴ Barna believes that God’s plan is for families to lead in the provision of spiritual development for their children and will be accountable before God for that responsibility (Deut 1:31; 6:4-9; 11:18-21; 21:18-19; Ps 78:5-8; Lk 8:39; Eph 6:4) Parents are encouraged to work in tandem with reliable spiritual partners—such as the Church— but should be sure that those partners are committed to the things of God (1Sam 1:27-28; 3:1-10; Rom 14:19; Eph 4:11-13) p. 82-83. Transforming: p.81.

⁴⁵ McCrindle Research.

⁴⁶ NCLS: 1991. Data indicates those before the age of 12 years.

Interestingly, according to a 2003 American nationwide study (analyzing more than 10,000 personal interviews) the Barna Group found most parents believe they are responsible for the spiritual development of their children, but few parents spend time in a typical week discussing or attending to spiritual matters with their children, underscoring the need for churches to help parents address and engage in the spiritual needs of their children more intentionally and effectively.⁴⁷

The Barna research found:

85% parents of children under 13 believe they have primary responsibility for teaching their children spiritual matters.⁴⁸

11% believed the church had primary responsibility

1% said it belonged to the school

19% of parents with children under 13 had never been contacted or spoken to by a church leader to discuss the parents' involvement in their children's spiritual development.

Related research indicated that although parents held this belief, they typically had no plan for the spiritual development of their children, did not consider it a priority, and had little or no training in how to nurture a child's faith.

The research also indicated, that for some it was not so much an unwillingness to provide more substantive teaching to the children but that parents often felt ill equipped to do so.

The research also noted that sometimes parents are not able to guide their children spiritually because they were also struggling with their own faith development.

Graham Stanton (Youthworks) reflected on whether our local situation may not be that different. Stanton notes a further study, surveying parents in a number of evangelical churches in the United States where parents were asked for their perceptions on who was responsible for their children's spiritual growth, and what they do as parents, to help their children grow in faith.⁴⁹

These were the results:

⁴⁷ Like many others, it is Barna's belief that, biblically speaking, parents should have prime responsibility for the spiritual nurture and development of children (and are accountable to God to do so) and that the Church is best poised to assist rather than lead in that process, to act as the secondary support mechanism (Deut 1:31; 6:4-9; 11:18-21; 21:18-19; Ps 78:5-8; Lk 8:39; Eph 6:4). With this order of priority, churches and parents must work in *mutual partnership*, with churches equipping parents to teach and nurture their children spiritually. Barna Study: *(Parents Accept Responsibility for their Child's Spiritual Development but Struggle with Effectiveness)* <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/120-parents-accept-responsibility-for-their-childs-spiritual-development-but-struggle-with-effectiveness>

⁴⁸ Barna's research indicated that while more than 4 out of 5 parents believe they have primary responsibility for the moral and spiritual development of their children, more than 2 out of 3 abdicate that responsibility to the church, and that in a typical week fewer than 10 percent of parents who regularly attend church with their children read the bible together, pray together or participate in an act of service as a family unit.

⁴⁹ Graham Stanton: *'Are Church Leaders Failing Parents'* (Sydney Anglicans Website: Aug 6th, 2010) Quoting statistics from Timothy Paul Jones' forthcoming book.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Parents—and particularly fathers—have a responsibility to engage in a discipleship process with each of their children	0%	0%	0%	4%	34%	62%
Church leaders are the people primarily responsible for discipling my children and teaching them to share the Gospel with others	37%	44%	11%	6%	0%	1%
	Never	Once or less	Couple of times	Three or Four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
How often in the past MONTH have I read or discussed the Bible with any of my children?	20%	10%	25%	10%	9%	26%
How often in the past TWO MONTHS has my family engaged in any type of family devotional or worship time together?	35%	10%	21%	6%	5%	22%

Every parent surveyed agreed it was their responsibility to disciple their children and did not believe that this responsibility primarily belongs to church leaders.

But, the perception of responsibility did not translate into practice. More than 1/2 of families hadn't read or discussed the Bible with their children more than once a fortnight. 2/3rds hadn't engaged in any family devotional more than once a month.

When asked, 'How often in the past year has any church leader made any contact with me to help me to engage actively in my child's spiritual development?'

The results of the survey were:⁵⁰

	Never	Once or less	Couple of times	Three or Four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
How often in the past year has any church leader made any contact with me to help me to engage actively in my child's spiritual development?	68%	12%	14%	5%	0%	2%

From this data, Stanton concludes that:

“One group of God's people and one area of service seems to have been neglected in our churches: that of preparing parents to serve God by raising their children in the fear and instruction of the Lord.”⁵¹

⁵⁰ *The Family Ministry Field Guide*, (2011): The Family Discipleship Perspectives and Practices Survey was conducted among two hundred and seventy-eight parents attending adult Bible study groups in thirty-six different evangelical congregations in the United States of America.

⁵¹ In response, Youthworks have developed a website and 'e-newsletter' designed to help parents learn how to disciple their children: <http://growingfaith.com.au/>

3.5. Intergenerational ministry and discipling to mitigate drop out:

“Those who have been sitting at the youth ministry ‘kids table’ don’t know church. They know youth group, not church”⁵²

“Twenty-somethings frequently feel isolated from their parents and other adults in the realm of faith and spirituality. Many young people feel that older adults don’t understand their doubts and concerns, a prerequisite to rich mentoring friendships; a majority of young adults interviewed reported never having an adult friend other than their parents. Can the church rediscover the intergenerational power of the assembly of saints”⁵³

The 2007 Francis and Richter’s study found the following as a preventative to attendance drop out:⁵⁴

- * Creating a safe space for people to share doubts and struggles in the faith: (16% of general church leavers felt no one at church would understand their doubts, 29% felt questioning their faith would not be acceptable)
- * Allowing children in the church to see adults practising their faith: (39% of church leavers considered church to be a “childhood activity” which they outgrew)

The 2003 Barna research indicated similar statistics and conclusions:⁵⁵

- * A factor causing kids to shelve their faith is the *segregation of kids and adults in church*. Kids who attend church-wide services are more likely to keep their faith.⁵⁶
- * Students who *serve and build relationships with younger children* the more likely they are to hang on to their faith.⁵⁷
- * Kids who left the faith report having questions about faith in early adolescence that were *ignored by significant adults* (parents, pastor, teacher).⁵⁸
- * Students who feel the freedom and have opportunities to *express their doubts* tend to have more sticky faith. (But less than half of those surveyed shared their doubts and struggles with adults or friends).⁵⁹

⁵² Sticky Faith: p.100.

⁵³ David Kinnaman: *You Lost Me: ‘Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church...And Rethinking Faith’*: (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011) p.29.

⁵⁴ Francis L & Richter P: *Gone for Good? Church—Leaving and Returning in the 21st Century*, (Epworth: Peterborough, 2007)

⁵⁵ Barna Study: ‘*Parents Accept Responsibility for their Child’s Spiritual Development but Struggle with Effectiveness*’: <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/120-parents-accept-responsibility-for-their-childs-spiritual-development-but-struggle-with-effectiveness>

⁵⁶ Sticky Faith: p.97.

⁵⁷ Sticky Faith: p.98.

⁵⁸ Sticky Faith: p.72.

⁵⁹ Sticky Faith: p.73.

(B) TOWARDS ADDRESSING THE ISSUES:

“Leaders may be keen to see children’s and youth work happening for the wrong reasons.

There are several widely-held beliefs which are rarely questioned.

One is: ‘we must reach children because they are the church of tomorrow’.

True, but aren’t they also the church of today?

Couldn’t you also argue that students or thirty-somethings are the church of tomorrow?

*Rather, isn’t the primary motive because they are there, and they are sinful people who need the gospel
– just like any other group?*

*Being clear about this ought to raise the value of the work from the level of human strategy to reach the next
generation, to God’s strategy for reaching every generation”⁶⁰*

Many of the findings from the data analysis above were confirmed and complemented, not only by anecdotal evidence from personal interviews with key players and experts in the field, through written responses to an extensive ‘Field Study Questionnaire’ to youth and children’s ministers (see Appendix), but also by canvassing and reviewing a broad base of Christian literature written specifically on youth and children’s ministry, both within our local context and internationally.

Although no ‘one’ silver bullet was proffered by any of the research mediums in response to the current challenges, there was a fairly consistent overlap, complementation and commonality across all research mechanisms in their attempt to identify and redress several of what were perceived as, recurring areas of concern.

The areas of concern identified were as follows:

1. Tension over numbers growth verses spiritual growth
2. Addressing leadership clarity and support
3. Competing or conflicting methodology/philosophy/strategy
4. Need for disciple-making intentionality and alignment
5. Realignment of spiritual responsibility
6. Intergenerational (as opposed to multigenerational) relationship engagement
7. Transitions and the need for ‘strategic flow’
8. Training and support

1. Numbers Growth Over Spiritual Growth:

“There’s always a pressure to grow in numbers... pressure to do the latest thing”

- Youth Minister: Sydney -

*“In youth ministry there’s constant pressure to grow the ministry,
coupled with a high turnover in youth ministers...”*

- Youth Minister: Sydney -

“When we look at photos of youth groups, we typically see lots of messy games and wacky skits.

*Given this perception, it becomes the expectation of parents, pastors, and church leaders
to see youth ministry continue in that way.*

*In truth, we don't want to bore the kids. Theology, on the other hand, is not usually perceived as fun.
So does the typical youth pastor pour time into reading theology or planning more fun programs? The answer
is not so difficult when we know a parent or student is going to ask if youth group will be fun this week”⁶¹*

⁶⁰ FAQs: *Biblical Answers to Youth and Children’s Leaders’ Questions* (Surrey: The Good Book Company, 2006) p.145. In the book *Perspectives on Family Ministry*, Strother echoes a similar sentiment, believing children and youth are not only vital for the future church but also for the present, and as such they should be called to responsibility and maturity as full participants in the community of faith. Timothy P. Jones: *Perspectives on family Ministry: 3 Views*: (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009) p.144. For further discussion on this topic, also note *‘Four Views on Youth Ministry and the Church’* in Appendix.

⁶¹ Cameron Cole and Dave Wright: *‘Why Theology and Youth Ministry Seldom Mix’* (Gospel Coalition Website: April 23rd 2012)

There appears to be a prevailing sense, amongst youth ministers in particular, that there's enormous pressure, either from within themselves, from parents or from Senior ministry leaders, to achieve growth in numbers, sometimes coming at the expense of preferred spiritual growth strategies.⁶² Rurlander aptly describes the existing tension for youth leaders this way:

*"A common and tenaciously held assumption is this: 'if you can see it, it's good'. That is, people will often be impressed by large numbers of kids simply 'in the building' on a Friday night, whether or not there is any decent biblical content to the program; or by a large buzzing high-tech youth service, which looks great, but is devoid of follow-up, discipleship or Bible Study, because all the leaders are too busy preparing vox pop videos and sketches for the event."*⁶³

And Fields:

*"We spent hours in preparation, training, and promotion to launch an entertaining program. It completely consumed all my leaders' time. And the result? It worked! Actually, it worked well for about six months, and then our students started to feel like we were using them to grow the group...the cost to them was a lack of authentic relationships with leaders and with one another. I had trained my leadership team to focus on attendance, activity, enthusiasm and competitive games."*⁶⁴

General research findings in this regard (combined with broad anecdotal evidence) are supported by much of the literature, most notably in Tim Hawkins' *'Fruit That Will Last'*, as well as Ken Moser's *'Entertained to Death'*.⁶⁵

Hawkins challenges the motivations and aims that can often be the real driving forces behind youth ministry i.e. attractional entertainment, instant results, and growing numbers over spiritual growth and personal discipleship.⁶⁶ Hawkins posits that one of the main reasons many youth ministries fail to produce lasting fruit in the lives of teenagers is that they fall prey to the temptation that, attracting large numbers equals a successful and thriving ministry.⁶⁷

Both Hawkins and Moser believe that we often confuse success in youth or children's ministry with 'entertainment ministry' and the number of kids in attendance, rather than growth in gospel understanding or gospel commitment.⁶⁸

Moser believes the use of attractional entertainment as the core methodology to build numbers and reach unbelievers is severely theologically flawed, stating:⁶⁹

1. *It's deceptive*: it uses deception as a lure rather than trusting in the power of the gospel to do its work. The 'front door' of the Christian faith should be to show the world who Jesus is, and the call to follow him (2Cor 4:1-5, 1Thess 2:3-6, Rom 1:16-17).

2. *It distracts from the 'attractional' Christ*: Jesus needs no trimmings to be attractive to those who are lost.

⁶² Several Barna studies pointed out that most Christian churches evaluate success in terms of program attendance, child satisfaction and parental satisfaction, but do little to examine individual spiritual advancement. *Spiritual Progress Hard to Find*.

⁶³ FAQs: p.144.

⁶⁴ Doug Fields: *Your First Two Years in Youth Ministry: a Personal and Practical Guide to Starting Right*: (El Cajon: Zondervan, 2002) p.85.

⁶⁵ Tim Hawkins: *Fruit That Will Last* (Surry: The Good Book Company, 1999). Ken Moser: *'Entertained to Death, the Case Against Entertainment in Youth Ministry'*: (Youthworker Journal Sept/Oct, 2003).

⁶⁶ *Fruit That Will Last*: p.13.

⁶⁷ Hawkins states there's nothing wrong with desiring or aiming for growth in numbers, but it can become an alluring seducer for a ministry, for the leadership, for parents and for the church. When the driving force of a youth or children's ministry becomes more 'attractional' in focus than gospel in emphasis, there's a danger of watering down the gospel, softening the message or changing the focus in order to keep numbers high. P.14.

⁶⁸ Petty echoes this sentiment, believing that the entertainment model of youth ministry often tries to compete with what the world has to offer, often by just mimicking the best the world has to offer, but this model does not ultimately produce disciples. *The Playbook*: p. 5.

⁶⁹ Moser goes much further by stating that this method is quite possibly anti-Christian and in the end non-productive. *Entertained to Death*: p. 1.

3. *It hides Christian community*: our attraction needs to be in being ‘salt and light’ first and foremost in our lives and in our groups (1Pet 2:12).

4. *It reduces the call for serious commitment to Christ*: to answer Christ’s call to take up the cross and follow him (Mk 8:34). Following Christ is not a life of ease or entertainment, believers are called to challenge the world, not entertain it.⁷⁰

Apart from theological objections, Moser also believes that pragmatically speaking, this false understanding burns out youth and children’s ministers. Simply put, there are limited resources to both attract and entertain unbelievers and also disciple believers, ultimately individual spiritual growth suffers. This methodological approach also presents a false dichotomy between what is fun and what is serious – that it’s impossible for a youth group to be both thoroughly Christian *and* attractive at the same time.⁷¹

For Hawkins, the real litmus test of the effectiveness of a youth or children’s ministry is not the crowds they may attract, but whether individuals stand firmly for Christ long after they’ve left the protective environment of the ministry. This only happens by making our purpose and priority the development of spiritual growth and transformation. By measuring our spiritual success in terms of the effectiveness of our discipling, by sowing God’s Word and God’s love into their lives, and by strategic and intentional ‘disciple-making’ i.e. when children and youth begin to multiply the ministry by sowing God’s Word and love into the lives of others.⁷²

From a Biblical perspective, we must always be reminded that youth and children’s ministry must start with the core belief that the aim of all ministry is not about numbers, entertainment or instant results, but ‘true gospel growth’, that is, spiritual maturity and transformation in the life of believers, both young and old (Matt 28:19-20, Col 1:5-10; 2:6-7). Therefore “*good youth [and children’s] ministry is about gospel growth - by maturing relationship with Christ, and thereby making disciples of Jesus*”.⁷³

2. Church Partnership, Integration and Support:

“We [Youth Ministers] are like the proverbial mad uncle that the rest of the family is a little unsure about what he gets up to. There’s a general feeling of warmth and goodwill towards us, without much genuine understanding of us, or interaction with us”
- Youth Minister: Sydney -

“The church hasn’t understood the significance of the ministry. It’s been understood enough to employ someone into the role, but they haven’t strategically thought about how kids ministry will be a vital tool in growing the church
e.g. ‘will we do a kids talk in church?’ answer: ‘maybe, when we’ve got time’ or ‘the service is busy today...can you cut the kids spot’...it’s always the first thing to go...
Children’s ministers are fighting to get this high on the profile. It’s often because the leadership hasn’t thought strategically enough about where kid’s ministry fits in the big picture. They know they want it, they just don’t know how to use it, or where it fits”
- Bruce Linton: previous Children’s Minister -

Much of the research literature and Field Questionnaires confirmed the significant role that the Senior Minister, church leadership and influential parents had to play in the effectiveness and success of youth and

⁷⁰ Entertained to Death: p.3.

⁷¹ Entertained to Death: p.3.

⁷² Fruit That Will Last: p.9. Also interesting to note, is that David Kinnaman’s research into factors that contributed to shallowness of faith and youth drop out rates post high school, found the practice of pursuing numbers growth over spiritual growth and transformation, and a focus on attracting ‘quantity over quality’ had a direct negative impact. Lost: p.124.

⁷³ Al Stewart (ed): No Guts, No Glory: ‘How to Build Youth Work That Lasts’: (Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2nd ed. 1990) p.11. It is important to note here that the N.T describes gospel growth and its progress, not just in numerical terms but primarily, and more significantly, by the fruit the gospel bears in the life of a believer as they grow and mature in love, godliness, knowledge and spiritual wisdom. This kind of growth is only possible by the power of God’s Spirit as His Word takes root in people’s hearts and brings forth transformation and regeneration (Jn 15:1-11).

children's ministry in the local church (both negatively and positively). Concerns tended to focus around two main areas:

a. The role of the Senior Minister is critical:

Responses from Field Questionnaires and individual interviews with children and youth ministers indicated that the understanding, support and shared vision of the Senior Minister in particular, were critical to the maintenance and success of these specialized ministries. Respondents indicated that in effect, if there was no understanding, shared vision or 'buy in' by the Senior leadership, the less likely it was that the ministries themselves would be effective, or that youth or children's ministers could sustain the position long term.⁷⁴

Bruce Linton described the importance of shared understanding, vision and supportive leadership this way:

"Invariably those asking them to do the ministry have had no experience in that ministry themselves...I'm not good at kids ministry myself, but I know you are, I want you to own it, I want you to be excited about it but I'm not much good at it'. So the message is – 'if you get stuck, don't come to me because I don't really know anything about it'.

This leaves the staff person at a dead end, they use every resource they've got for a couple of years then falter as to where to go next, or how to build the ministry...often then being burnt out and leaving the ministry. What they haven't done is shown them how they can be genuinely supported by church leadership and how they can fit into a strategic plan for the church. They are left feeling isolated and under resourced".

Equally so, was the recognition of the need for long term, consistent leadership, not only in the youth and children's ministry, but in the Senior leadership as well:

"One of our problems is that youth pastors and youth leaders do not stay in youth ministry long enough to bring about long term results. Go to a Youth Pastors Conference and try and find someone who's been a youth pastor longer than 5 years. Or one who has been at his current church for longer than 3 years!"⁷⁵

"Children's ministry is most effective with long-term, committed staff, but our Diocesan structures do not promote such long-term placements in local churches...there's often frequent turnover of Rectors, many staying well under 10 years, this makes other staffing positions and ministry philosophies difficult to uphold over the long time needed for ministry to children...It wouldn't be unusual for a child to have had 3 different rectors at a church from ages 0-18, who may all have significant differences in the impact/change they bring to a children's ministry".⁷⁶

b. Relationship with the church community is critical:

"Burnout is an all too familiar scenario, usually happening between 18mths -2yrs. Often they feel isolated in the task and anxiety in not always knowing where to go next. They need to encourage their church to help them see where they strategically fit within the bigger vision of the church and how the leadership can help them maintain that focus. If they feel they're a band-aid, a token position or just keeping people quiet, then energy & enthusiasm for the task is lost"
- Bruce Linton: Children's Minister -

"Many a once enthusiastic youth leader has decided that perhaps they misread the call, got the timing wrong, chose the wrong position in the wrong church or should have gone for their trip

⁷⁴ Effective Ministries: Youth Ministry Field Questionnaire and Children's Ministry Field Questionnaire, 2012.

⁷⁵ Fruit that Will Last: p10.

⁷⁶ Effective Ministries: Children's Ministry Field Questionnaire, 2012.

*around the world to get some life experience first. As they slip into the shadows with their confidence knocked and questions about the God they thought they were following few people notice...so we chalk up another youth leader who lasts less than 3 years in the role. It's almost so typical that it seems normal, so there aren't too many questions asked"*⁷⁷

In 2009 the *Council of Churches of Christ (COC)*, in partnership with *Youth Vision Australia*, conducted extensive research on how local churches and youth leaders could create environments that would secure the retention of youth leaders and facilitate enduring and mission-shaped youth ministries. One of the significant findings was that a healthy relationship between the youth leadership and the local church leadership was critical.⁷⁸

Findings indicated that the sense of isolation of youth ministers and their leadership was often exacerbated by the *lack of partnership, support and shared philosophy* experienced between the youth leadership and the church community, leading to conflict, discouragement and frequent youth minister turnover:

*"Conflict between aspects of the church community and youth leaders can often be traced back to two main areas: communication and perception. Church communities often have unspoken (but strong) perceptions about how 'niche' (such as youth, children's, worship, etc.) should function, and this can be a potential point of confusion between aspects of the church community and those involved in youth ministry"*⁷⁹

Interestingly, the COC report concluded that the common experience of isolation and ministry dislocation that frequently accompanies specialization in ministries was unhelpful, not only for the specialization minister and their young flock, but also for the loss in ministry and relational interconnection with the broader church as well. Stanton aptly describes the, all too familiar, ministry disconnect in the following way:

*"The picture of a one-eared Mickey Mouse is an image that has been used to describe the relationship between youth ministry and the rest of the church. A large circle represents the life of the church and the adult congregation (Mickey Mouse's head), with a smaller circle, the youth ministry (Mickey's one ear) loosely attached, off on the side"*⁸⁰

Research indicated that a 'siloed' youth leader (or ministry) like the one described, was far less likely to be healthy (indeed youth ministers who tended to stay in youth ministry did so partly because they were encouraged to play a role in the church beyond the 'traditional scope' of youth ministry, and were also resourced to do that).⁸¹ Likewise, research also indicated that the youth themselves were also being disadvantaged by their disconnect from the broader Christian community:

*"The popular concept is that young people are best served by enjoying virtually exclusive contact with their peers while at church needs rethinking...by encouraging minimal or insignificant contact with mature adults, there is the distinct possibility that young people will not grow up as quickly as they could or should...exposure to the life and gatherings of the rest of the church is essential, not optional"*⁸²

"We have to be sure that we don't segregate the youth for our sake and theirs. They are part of the body of Christ too, and no part of the body can remain healthy if one of its members is

⁷⁷ Youth Ministry Action Team Report, as quoted in *'Asking The Unasked Questions: Examining how local churches and youth leaders can create environments for retaining youth leaders and facilitating enduring and mission-shaped youth ministries'* (Published by Council of Churches of Christ in Australia in partnership with Youth Vision Australia: 2009). P.2.

⁷⁸ This report was not designed to present definitive answers for youth leader turnover and drop out but as an information and support document for youth leaders and their churches.

⁷⁹ Asking The Unasked Questions: p.8.

⁸⁰ G. Stanton: *'Mickey Mouse Youth Ministry'* (Sydney Anglicans Website: Feb. 22ⁿ. 2010)
http://sydneyanglicans.net/ministry/modernministry/mickey_mouse_youth_ministry

⁸¹ Asking The Unasked Questions: p.8.

⁸² FAQs: p.18.

cut off and put to the side. If we segregate the youth, not only do we lose all they have to teach us, but we also inadvertently teach them that the church is really only for adults - those who are married and have families of their own. And then we wonder why they don't get involved in church as college students or young singles, when in reality, we've been telling them all along that the church isn't yet for them”⁸³

Both COC research and the broader literature indicate that for greatest effectiveness, vitality and longevity, both youth ministers and youth ministries need consistent, intentional connection and interaction within the broader church community. While youth ministry is a specialized ministry, it should never be one that stands apart from the local church or other inter-church ministries.

In the article: *'Moving beyond the shock absorber: The place of youth ministry - past, present and future'*, Stuart Crawshaw suggests that part of the answer today, is a movement away from the 'homogeneous unit principle' of the past, to the development of a much more congregationally integrated model of youth ministry in the future.⁸⁴

“The next revolution may find ways of not reducing young people’s ministry down to a department within a local church. The homogeneous unit principle assumes that the best people to evangelize young people are young people, but, in the process, youth ministry and those involved in it have been devalued. Youth ministers are generally short-term cadet positions in the local church, with the expectation that the people filling these roles will go on to train for ‘real ministry’ in the future.

The next revolution needs to discover ways to include the whole congregation in the bringing up of young people, giving them continuity, helping them to read the Bible for themselves, but also encouraging them to live it out more interdependently as servants in mission together (not as consumers of targeted ministry) as they reach out to non-church youth. It may look a bit more like what we lost over the last few hundred years while trying keep up with secularism”⁸⁵

Crawshaw is not a lone voice in calling for greater integration and interaction by specialized ministries within the life and ministry of the broader congregation, as well as an increased need for strategic and intentional intergenerational engagement, as we shall discover later in this paper.⁸⁶

3. Competing or Conflicting Methodology/Philosophy/Strategy:

*“We don’t really go for that ‘vision’ stuff... I guess we just align ourselves...”
- Youth Minister: Sydney -*

*“The overall vision of the church is not as clear as ours.
We share the same buzzwords of ‘Connect’, but the youth discipleship pathway makes it much clearer for each individual how they can grow as disciples specifically as part of being in Youth”
- Youth Minister: Sydney -*

⁸³ Mark Howard: *'Youth need the church and the church need youth'*: (Gospel Coalition Website: April 30th, 2012)
<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tqc/2012/04/30/youth-need-the-church-and-the-church-needs-youth/>

⁸⁴ Crawshaw defines the homogeneous unit principle as 'designing ministry styles for different culture groups within a congregation', a ministry practice that evolved as a consequence of seeking to be relevant to an increasingly pluralistic culture. Crawshaw believes that an unlooked for consequence of this development was an emphasis on individualism in the church, with Christians growing up with different ministries for different generations, mirroring the growing consumerism in western society. While a sense of community was eroded in the secular world, the church was seeking to emulate its appeal to plurality. *Moving Beyond the Shock Absorber: The place of Youth Ministry – Past, Present and Future'*: (The Briefing: Sept 2008). P.13.

⁸⁵ Beyond the Shock Absorber: p.15.

⁸⁶ For example: The likes of Timothy P Jones, Reggie Joiner, Graham Stanton, David Kinnaman, George Barna, Chap Clark, K.E Powell and others, all challenge the traditional 'programmatically ministry model' where children or youth ministries are almost exclusively organized around separate 'silos' with little consistent intergenerational interaction, genuine parental partnership, or broader congregational engagement. While the homogeneous unit principle is attractive and can lead to numerical (quantitative) growth, it is restricted and even prohibitive of qualitative growth. Without cross-generational fellowship and discipling it is harder to foster life long discipling, mentoring and growth in Christian maturity. For further reflection also note *'Four Views on Youth Ministry and the Church'* in Appendix.

Both the literature and Field Questionnaires confirmed that it was not uncommon for there to be *conflicting aims*, a lack of *directional clarity*, or general *disconnect* between the various ministry substructures within a church (such as between the children's, youth, young adult and adult ministry). Similarly, there can be a disconnect between the ministry substructures and the broader church in relation to differing philosophical approach or methodology, which can often then lead to dislocation and discontinuity, or competition and rivalry within church systems.

The difficulties can appear at 4 levels:

1. Between the Children's or Youth Minister and the church leadership:

As mentioned in the previous section, there can often be a sense of isolation, ministry disconnection or conflict of vision for the youth or children's ministry with the church leadership. This is particularly exacerbated when there is a clash of expectation in regard to specific *ministry methodology*, or a differing *ministry philosophy* between the specialist minister and the senior leadership (or between the specialist minister and parents, or other key leaders in the church). This can lead to internal conflict, stress, burnout, loss of momentum or frequent leadership turnover on ministry teams.⁸⁷

"We have some differences in the nature of how 'hands on' I should be in children's ministry, and what it means to 'do' children's ministry, as opposed to leading a children's ministry"
- Children's Minister: Sydney

"Primarily, they want me to get kids into the Church (numbers.) I see my role as being about taking the ministry forward and doing what we do better and better, the numbers are up to God, not me! The reality is also that I am a middle of the road evangelical, and some of those involved in our Church would identify themselves as Charismatic, so there is the slight but persistent pressure (not from my Rector) to move from biblical teaching to "experiencing" God more..."
- Children's Minister: Sydney

There can also be a lack of clarity and insight by the church leadership into the content, practices and expected outcomes of the specialist ministries under their oversight.

*"Most church leaders we interviewed...are uninformed as to the spiritual content and practices related to their children's ministry, and almost none of those church leaders is able to provide specific insights into how satisfactorily the children are maturing in their faith"*⁸⁸

2. Between ministry sub-teams within the church:

Again, there can be differences in *ideology*, lack of *combined articulated vision*, or little or no *strategy integration* across or between the children's ministry, youth ministry, young adults and adult ministry. It is not entirely uncommon to find ministry sub-teams ministering as separate 'silos' *alongside* each other, and *independently* of each other, and at times in competition with each other for limited church resources or in the recruiting of volunteer leadership.

"The Youth ministry doesn't relate formally with the Children's ministry because the Children's ministry doesn't have an articulated vision, though of course they're trying to see kids saved and built up as disciples. It's just not articulated"- Youth Minister: Sydney

"We [Children's & Youth Ministers] have never sat down as two teams and talked about how this philosophy connects...which I now realise we should" - Children's Minister: Sydney

⁸⁷ Danny Rurlander has a helpful chapter on how to get the church leadership excited about children's and youth work in the book 'FAQS: Biblical Answers to Youth and Children's Leaders' Questions.' P.141.

⁸⁸ Transforming: p.39

3. Between the specialist ministry and the vision and strategy of the broader church:

*“There appears to be a broad lack of long-term strategy of children’s ministry, both in the diocese and in local churches...many children’s ministries exist because they always have, or, ‘something needs to be done for the kids’
- Children’s Minister: Sydney -*

As mentioned previously, there can be a lack of direction, clarity, misalignment or disconnect between the specialist ministry strategy or methodological approach and that of the broader church it serves.

One specialist minister captured the common disconnect this way:

“It’s not uncommon for someone to be asked to run the children’s ministry who may be good with kids (e.g. ex-teachers) but haven’t necessarily had ministry training or have conceptualised a clear strategy ahead. They may be doing great work with kids but they’re not encouraged to think through how that might fit within the wider church. They may be given a list of tasks (e.g. Sunday school, kids club, scripture etc.) but no set or pre-organized program/curriculum to follow. The structures might be in place but no particular strategy”

4. Regarding ‘best practice’ in youth and children’s ministry:

“Without a clear idea of our philosophy we could easily get bedazzled by whatever the latest and greatest ministry model from America happens to be”⁸⁹

Quite apart from the three above mentioned internal ministry challenges, youth and children’s ministers themselves are often overwhelmed by the challenge of discerning and deciding what might *philosophically, theologically* and *pragmatically* be ‘best practice’ in youth or children’s ministry within our particular theological and cultural context.

Common theological and practical concerns are:

- Should we focus the ministry on the *churched* or the *unchurched*?
- Should our ministry model be ‘*attractional*’ and ‘*missional*’, or on building ‘*youth communities*’ and ‘*youth churches*,’ or should our emphasis be *Bible teaching* and *discipleship* based?⁹⁰
- What balance should there be between building *Biblical depth* and being *culturally engaged*?⁹¹

These important theological and practical questions of ministry methodology can be a difficult landscape to navigate and execute, particularly if the youth or children’s minister has had no theological training, no clear

⁸⁹ The Playbook: p.5.

⁹⁰ Of particular heated debate is tension over the purpose and priority of reaching the lost versus focusing on nurturing believers. Moser believes that often youth groups focus on attracting the outsider over the insider. Moser believes that this model, in essence, is ‘reaching around’ the regular to grab the newcomer, but we must never reach the outsider at cost to the regular. Moser’s belief is that we need to build up before we can reach out. That effective evangelism is always done with a solid base of Christian disciples. Our role is to equip the disciple of Christ to bring along their friends to a program that is built on Christ. This model focuses on the converted in the aim of helping and training them to connect with and witness to, unbelieving friends. Moser, Petty, Aston and Moon all believe that evangelism is best achieved by equipping the youth themselves: i.e. ‘*friends of Christ bringing friends to Christ*’. Ashton & Moon put it this way: “*Evangelism is usually a gradual attraction into a community of faith – that is, into a group of Christian young people who are thoroughly committed to one another. In youth work, the main evangelists will be the young people themselves. The major task for the youth leader will be to equip and enable young people naturally to attract others to themselves*” Ken Moser: *Changing The World Through Effective Youth Ministry* (Baulkham Hills: Youthsurge Press, 2004) p. 27 & 28. Mark Ashton & Phil Moon: *Christian Youth Work* (Bletchly: Authentic Media, 2007) p.84. One group trying to explore the place of community in youth ministry is the ‘Soul Revival’ Movement: <http://www.soulrevival.org.au>.

⁹¹ Ashton & Moon describe the tension this way - “*There are two fundamental necessities in Christian communication. One is that we take the world we live in seriously; and the other is that we take God’s revelation to us in the Bible seriously. If either is missing, the communication will be ineffective. However, either of these necessities may become all absorbing, we can strive so hard to be relevant to young people that we immerse ourselves in their culture to a point where the distinctiveness of the Christian message vanishes. Or we can be so concerned to be faithful to the Bible and the culture of our world are miles apart.*” Christian Youth work: p.4.

guidance in the task, is carrying multiple ministry portfolios or ministering in a part time or short term capacity (none of which are entirely uncommon).⁹²

Note: Read - ‘*Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church*’ in the appendix section of this paper for an outline of several differing methodological models of youth ministry (particularly how those models relate to the broader church).

4. Disciple-Making Intentionality and Alignment:

*“Faith trajectories (along with other life trajectories) are often set in early adolescence. Sadly most youth ministries are long on fun and fluff and short on listening and thoughtful engagement. The former produces a million paper boats; the latter produces a handful of seaworthy ships. Launching a million paper boats is an amazing spectacle on a clear summer day, but only a ship can weather storms and cross oceans”*⁹³

*“The goal of all Christian ministry, in all its forms, is disciple-making”*⁹⁴

One of the most frequently raised issues across the scope of the research (i.e. literature, data research, and field questionnaires) was a common concern regarding *youth drop out rates, Christian longevity, shallowness of faith*, and the apparent lack of *intentional discipling and disciple-making* within children’s, youth and young adult ministries.⁹⁵

In fact, most of the research raising such concerns tended to draw a direct correlation between the presenting problem of youth drop out rates, Christian longevity and shallowness of faith with the evident lack of intentional discipling and disciple-making.⁹⁶

Note Kinnaman:

*“...the Christian church has a shallow faith problem because we have a discipleship problem...Too many are incapable of reasoning clearly about their faith and unwilling to take real risks for Christ’s sake. These shortcomings are indicators of gaps in disciple-making”*⁹⁷

And reflections by two local practitioners in the field:

“There is (as always) the challenge to run groups based around fun and games rather than on discipleship and being distinctly Christian” - Youth Minister: Sydney

“The old models of youth ministry and children’s ministry seem to be unintentionally making attenders but not disciples” - Youth Minister: Sydney

⁹² It is not uncommon for youth ministers to carry multiple ministry portfolios, each requiring different skills, expertise and management demands. It may be a mix of children’s and youth, youth and young adults, or youth and evening congregation. For a female it may, for example, be children’s and family ministry or children and women’s ministry.

⁹³ Sticky Faith: p.92.

⁹⁴ C. Marshall & T. Payne: *The Trellis And The Vine*: (Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2009) p.153.

⁹⁵ The verb ‘*to disciple*’, describes the *process* by which we encourage another person to be such a follower of Jesus; it means the *methods* we use to help that person to become mature in Christ and so be in a position where they may then disciple someone else. By ‘discipling’, Al Stewart best describes the term as – ‘*more than simply evangelizing unbelievers, discipling is defined as: prayerfully and faithfully building people up until they are mature followers of the Lord Jesus (Col1:28). Discipling is moving people forward in their knowledge of God; in their commitment to Christ; and in their commitment to serving others*’. (No Guts: p64-65). The term ‘disciple-making’ is when those same believers go on to help others become what they themselves are – disciples of Christ. Hawkins describes it this way – ‘*Making disciples is not a course or curriculum but ‘the implanting of the passion to follow Christ from one person to another’ and ‘the mark of a trained disciple is their capacity to go and help make a disciple of someone else*’ (Fruit: p. 97,121). In this regard, true discipleship and disciple-making must be understood as a *process* not a program.

⁹⁶ Note in particular the section on ‘*Youth Loss and Disengagement*’ in point 3.2 of this paper.

⁹⁷ Lost: p. 120.

In response to these concerns, the research affirmed the need for children's, youth and young adult ministries to begin to address or redress the following:

a. To address the *command* to make disciples:

*"So what should be our basic aim in working with young people?
To challenge them with the message of Christ and to nurture them in the way of Christian discipleship"*⁹⁸

The literature called for a refocus in our youth and children's ministry on the *nature* and *nurture* of *Christian discipleship*. Following the Great Commission in Matthew 28 the call of Jesus to his disciples was to 'go forth and *make* disciples'. This injunction made to the first disciples to go forward and grow the gospel by 'making disciples' is meant to be a paradigm for all disciples who follow. Carson notes that this disciple making function and priority becomes *"binding on all Jesus' disciples to make others what they themselves are – disciples of Christ."*⁹⁹

Likewise, Hull describes the intention of the Great Commission this way: *"Disciple-making should be installed at the heart of the church, and the commanded product of the church is a fruit-bearing believer called a disciple. Christ's command to his church to make disciples provides the scriptural mandate"*. This disciple-making mandate includes the call and scriptural obligation to go forth and make 'fruit bearing' disciples of children, youth and young adults.¹⁰⁰

Petty describes the outworking of this first principle within youth ministry this way:

"Without any abashment [our] Youth is a ministry of discipleship...The command is to make disciples, by firstly baptizing them, which in the New Testament is almost code for converting them to the faith. Once converted the journey of discipleship continues as we teach teenagers all the things Jesus taught his disciples. There is a direct connection between disciple-making and teaching about Jesus, and no connection whatsoever to entertaining people or providing them with a safe place to hang out. So we aim to produce disciples, whole-hearted disciples in fact, of Jesus".¹⁰¹

Petty believes this emphasis on 'disciple-making' ensures a greater likelihood of producing disciples who last rather than merely entertaining teenagers. Petty's belief is that disciple-making is achieved primarily by *"expecting the word of God to do the work of God"* (Rom 1:16-17) and by youth having the opportunity to *"live out their faith in a community of positive relationships"* where *"real Christian life change can be taught and modelled"*.¹⁰² In other words- *"grow whole-hearted disciples of Jesus, through excellent teaching of the scriptures in the context of authentic relationships"*.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Christian Youth work: p.21.

⁹⁹ Don Carson: Matthew Commentary: EBC

¹⁰⁰ Bill Hull: The Disciple-Making Pastor (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1988) p.50.

¹⁰¹ Petty believes the entertainment model of youth ministry often tries to compete with what the world has to offer, often by just mimicking the best the world has to offer, but this model does not ultimately produce Christian disciples. Petty has developed a 'discipleship pathway' for all youth members. From: *'connect – grow – serve'*. *'Connecting'* through the 3 program entry points (Sunday youth meeting, Friday bible study & camps) each with an invitation to experience something greater, to *'grow'*, - through core programs with an invitation to try service, and to *'serve'* by providing various opportunities to serve the group or wider community. Playbook: p.7 &11.

¹⁰² Following on from the model of the Trinity and the Bible's emphasis on relationships, Petty believes in the importance of youth building positive and healthy relationships of many kinds. With the belief that God expects his people to live out their faith in a community of positive relationships, and that it is in relationships that life change can be taught & modelled: *"It is clear that God expects his people to live out their faith in a community of positive relationships...As it turns out, it is relationships rather than a drop-in centre that provide a safe place for teenagers. It is relationships that create real fun and protect a group from becoming boring. And it is in relationships through which real Christian life change can be taught and modeled"*. Playbook: p.9.

¹⁰³ Important to note here is that although there's some intentional 1-1 discipling, Petty's model is primarily a *group discipleship* ministry, rather than a one-to-one discipleship ministry. Likewise, Tim Hawkins chooses a group discipling method over that of 1-1 discipling. Hawkins calls their small group ministry *'Discipleship Teams'* (D-Teams), giving an emphasis to the core focus of the group. Meeting not primarily to study the Bible, though they do that too, but to *'grow as disciples and be trained as disciple-makers.'* p.157.

Moser sums up the discipling obligation best: *“My aim in youth ministry is to make disciples. It is my plan, purpose, reason, aim, objective, target and task. I am bent on making disciples of Jesus. If I do not do this, I have fallen short of the mark.”*¹⁰⁴

b. To not just make disciples but - *disciple-making disciples*:

*“...it’s a call to be biblical in our thinking that all believers are expected to have a ministry. They might never get a staff position in a church, but Jesus’ expectation on every disciple is that they too will be an active disciple-maker”*¹⁰⁵

Following Christ’s command in the Great commission, Jesus’ expectation on every Christian is that they too will be an active *disciple-maker*. Hawkins believes our prime mission focus must be to *‘impact the world for Christ by empowering our youth to be passionate disciples of Christ’*, this includes the passion to make others what they themselves are i.e. to be *‘making disciples’*.¹⁰⁶

Hawkins is quick to clarify that *‘true discipling’* is not limited to the activity of evangelism alone, or *‘post conversion discipleship’* activities. This presents a false dichotomy of relationship. Rather, it encompasses both, (including disciples reproducing themselves to go and *‘make’* other disciples) an activity which is more rightly called *‘disciple-making’*.¹⁰⁷

Petty, Hawkins, Ashton and Moon all believe the aim of youth and children’s ministry is not to *‘bring students to Christ’*, but to *‘make disciples of all nations’*, and this task is best achieved by ministry *replication and multiplication* i.e. by discipling the Christians first, and then equipping them to reach out to their friends.¹⁰⁸ The role and function of the ministry leader, their team, and any ministry program is to *‘multiply’* the ministry by equipping youth to be passionate disciples and effective disciple-makers.¹⁰⁹ In the words of Fields - *“this style of ministry becomes a ministry WITH students rather than a program-centred ministry TO students. Programs don’t develop relationships; people do.”*¹¹⁰

Ashton and Moon likewise describe the process and priority this way:

*“We want to teach them people skills - how to lead their friends to Christ, how to care for each other spiritually, how to become servant leaders in laying down their lives for one another...Evangelism is usually a gradual attraction into a community of faith – that is, into a group of Christian young people who are thoroughly committed to one another. In youth work, the main evangelists will be the young people themselves. The major task for the youth leader will be to equip and enable young people naturally to attract others...”*¹¹¹

¹⁰⁴ Changing The World: p. 16.

¹⁰⁵ Fruit: p.126.

¹⁰⁶ Fruit: p.92, 126.

¹⁰⁷ Hawkins defines discipleship as: *‘true discipleship is when a learning and maturing disciple invests his time in someone else’s life, helps them to maturity in Christ; sows God’s word into them; implants in them a passion for ministry, and equips them to go out and make others into disciples of Christ’*. The mark of a trained disciple is their capacity to go and help make a disciple of someone else. In this regard, disciple-making is always *relational*, where the life of one maturing disciple is reproduced in someone else. Fruit: p.97.

¹⁰⁸ Petty’s philosophy is: *“rather than try capturing random young people by running a program that we think they might find entertaining, we reach out to non-believers through the people already associated with our group...every thing we run is an open opportunity to invite friends along...Although some churches are keen to specify which of their programs are entry points we are happy for our group members to basically invite friends to whichever one they find the easiest to get friends along to...We remind our group members to bring a friend along directly by encouraging them to do just that. We also welcome new friends every Sunday as part of our program, which serves as an ongoing reminder that new friends are always welcome to join us”*. Playbook: p.45.

¹⁰⁹ Hawkins refers to his particular process as *‘P.E.E.R Witnessing’* (*Pray, Encourage, Evangelise, Recruit*). **Praying** for friends, **encouraging** through acts of Christ-like love, **evangelizing** through the 5 steps of evangelism (tell friends you attend Crossfire group, church & are Christian, tell them one reason you are Christian, ask if they’d like to find out more) and **recruiting** by inviting friends to group & evangelistic events.

¹¹⁰ Doug Fields: Purpose Driven Youth Ministry: PWDM (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) p.195.

¹¹¹ Christian Youth work: p.84 & 85.

In this regard, Hawkins recommends a 3-step strategy for youth leaders in training and equipping youth to engage in the process of learning how to make disciples:¹¹²

Youth must be trained in how to:

1. Bring friends to Christ
2. Build each other up in Christ
3. Be sent out for Christ

It's critical to note here that the disciple-making *purpose* and *priority* is as imperative for children's ministry as it is for youth, young adult and adult ministry. In his book – '*Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions: Why Children Should be your Church's #1 Priority*', Barna lists the importance of the intentional discipleship of children amongst one of his 'six pillars of Christian formation' (alongside *worship, evangelism, stewardship, service and community*).¹¹³

Barna believes that we are not sufficiently conscientious about the discipleship process; particularly its need to be a lifelong, moment-to-moment process, our role should be to lead children to develop a "*habit of continual spiritual growth through prayer, Bible study, service and various spiritual disciplines*".¹¹⁴ Barna also states that the responsibility of all Christians to be obedient to the Great Commission of Matt 28 is as true for children as it is for adults, therefore our core responsibility as parents, leaders and churches is to intentionally nurture, equip and encourage children in that task.

c. The need to bridge cultural, relational and spiritual 'gaps':

In both their writing and research Kinnaman, Fields and Barna all note that there exists significant *cultural, relational* and specific *spiritual formation* 'gaps' in our current ministry to children and youth that need bridging.

1. Bridging specific spiritual and relational gaps:

Kinnaman believes there are 3 specific relational and spiritual arenas where particular disciple-making 'gaps' are in evidence:

1. In the area of *relationships* – gaps in significant intergenerational and parental faith influences¹¹⁵
2. In the area of *vocation* - knowing how to connect and relate vocational choices with faith in Christ¹¹⁶
3. In the area of *wisdom* – gaps in understanding how to pursue [God given] wisdom over information

Of particular note are Kinnaman's reflections on what he views as an '*information-wisdom*' gap. Kinnaman states that this generation has more access to knowledge content than any other generation in human history, but many lack discernment in how to wisely apply that knowledge to their lives and the world.¹¹⁷

Kinnaman's research discovered that youth today find it difficult to move beyond being mere *consumers of information* to become *people of wisdom*. They may admire the words and works of Jesus (information) but

¹¹² Fruit: p.98.

¹¹³ Transforming. p.72.

¹¹⁴ Transforming: p.73.

¹¹⁵ Research found that youth often feel isolated from their parents and feel they are lacking in rich mentoring relationships of other Christian adults. Lost: p29.

¹¹⁶ We need to help youth connect spiritual wisdom with real world knowledge, that we make little effort to help disciples connect the dots between their vocation and their faith, not only in the area of science and education etc. but especially so in the creative arena (music, art, film, writing etc.) Lost p.30-31, 52 &127.

¹¹⁷ Kinnaman states: "*Young adults are digital natives immersed in a glossy pop culture that prefers speed over depth, sex over wholeness, and opinion over truth. But it is not enough for the faith community to run around with our hair on fire, warning about the hazards of cultural entrapment. God's children in the next generation need more and deserve better...they need wisdom...the spiritual, mental and emotional ability to relate rightly to God, to others and to our culture...And true wisdom is rooted in knowing and revering the God who has revealed himself in Christ through the scriptures; Prov 9:10.*" Lost: p.30.

not *know* him as Lord and God (wisdom). They read and respect the Bible (information) but they do not perceive that it's words lay claim to their *obedience* (wisdom). What's therefore needed is more than a list of 'dos and don'ts, signing pledges, or completing programs, but a lifetime process of deep *transformation* through faith in Christ, knowledge of God's *Word*, living by the power of the *Holy Spirit*, and engaging in rich *community* with other believers.

Similarly, Fields also believes students need more than information, that youth ministries are filled with Bible-literate students who bear no fruit, with all the right 'knowledge' but making none of the right daily life choices. What's therefore needed is a *program-based discipleship plan* to bridge this gap.¹¹⁸

Field's formula to bridge the gap also consists of 3 components:

1. Spiritual *education* (teaching/small groups etc.)
2. Formation of *independent spiritual habits* through the spiritual disciplines¹¹⁹
3. Formation of *significant relational influences*¹²⁰

At this point it's important for us to recognize that true discipleship and disciple-making is always a *process* not a program. It means that disciples must be *made* or *formed*, not just informed. The process is not about imparting theological *information* but about personal, relational and spiritual *formation* and *transformation* (Gal 4:19, Rom 8:29, 12:2-3, 2Cor 3:18, Eph 4:14-15). This is certainly the 'holistic' intention of Jesus' words to the disciples in the Great Commission.

For Barna, the gap likewise exists in the need to develop greater emphasis on the process of spiritual *formation* and *transformation* over mere transference of *information*.¹²¹ But Barna also suggests there's a critical need today for children's ministries to begin to foster in the lives of their students a well-developed *biblical worldview*.

Barna believes churches often lack a clear and focused emphasis on the *spiritual transformation* of their children, particularly the critical importance of developing, not just Bible knowledge or stories, but a well developed *biblical worldview* from the earliest years of life. Children's ministries need to help children to think biblically, comprehensively, insightfully and practically in regard to any moral, ethical, relational, financial, political or spiritual situation they find themselves in.¹²²

2. Bridging cultural gaps:

The final area that must be bridged is in countering a '*culture of low expectation*' of our youth and young adults. Cole and Wright in their web article: '*Why Theology and Youth Ministry Seldom Mix*', believe that society, church and parents alike continue to lower the bar of expectation on our children and youth, particularly in underestimating what they are able to theologically comprehend, thus increasing the likelihood of shallow faith and reduction in Christian longevity:

"When we don't expect teens to rise to challenges, we don't teach them doctrine. However, this lack of confidence in teens has left us with an ignorant generation (or several) with regard to

¹¹⁸ PDYM: p.158.

¹¹⁹ Field's outlines 6 spiritual discipline habits he believes we should make sure our students take with them: 1. Consistent prayer and bible reading 2. An accountable relationship with another Christian 3. Commitment to the body of Christ and church body (not just youth group) 4. To understand and participate in giving/tithing 5. Memorize scripture 6. To be able to study the Bible on their own (beyond reading) PDYM: p.160.

¹²⁰ This would include peers, parents, leaders and broader Christian intergenerational influences.

¹²¹ Ivy Beckwith likewise believes that the focus within our children's ministries should never be on entertainment or information download, but the scriptures must be taught towards the development of - '*authentic spiritual formation*'. Instead of a narrow focus on cognitive learning of Bible stories, there must be a primary concentration on '*forming*' children's *relationship* with God, and *nurturing* faithfulness in their total way of life i.e. to "*help children live God's story, not just learn it*". Beckwith believes that to achieve this the Church must operate on a new paradigm, a shift in outcomes as well as methods, a reorientation and expansion of goals for children's education away from the *traditional school model* to a *formational model* of ministry. Ivy Beckwith: *Formational Children's Ministry: Shaping Children using Story, Ritual and Relationship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010). P.18.

¹²² Barna emphasizes 4 cornerstones that are necessary in a child's spiritual transformation and development of worldview: 1. The Bible: 2.A commanding knowledge of Biblical content: teaching connection between principles and application 3.The identification of organizing principles: 4. A burning desire to obey God: Transforming: p. 67f.

what the church actually believes. It is strange that we teach young people complex calculus and physics but don't think they can handle or will be interested in understanding the significance of the Trinity or atonement”¹²³

Likewise, Kinnaman's research found evidence that parents and churches have expectations of young adults that are *too low* or driven by *cultural ideas of success*, expecting more from them in terms of school work and achievement etc., than in terms of pursuing growth in the Christian faith. Likewise, there was often a tendency for adults to perceive mere *attendance* at children's or youth programs, or participation in church 'activities' as an adequate expression of Christian commitment, engagement or discipleship.¹²⁴

Interestingly, one pair of Christian college students (Alex and Brett Harris) recently began a countercultural move, a rebellion (or more accurately – a 'rebelution') against what they perceive as the prevalent low expectations by parents, churches and society of Christian teenagers today.¹²⁵ The authors believe that:

“...when you look around today, in terms of godly character and practical competence, our culture does not expect much of us young people. We are not only expected to do very little that is wise or good, but we're expected to do the opposite. Our media-saturated youth culture is constantly reinforcing lower and lower standards and expectations...ours is not a rebellion against God-established authority, It's a refusal to be defined by our ungodly, rebellious culture...We call it the 'myth of adolescence' and the Rebelution is all about busting that myth”.
¹²⁶

Using 1Tim 4:2 as their basis, Alex and Brett Harris believe that *“as young people we are called to be exemplary in all areas of life. Our generation is falling incredibly short of that calling. Instead of serving as the launching pad of life, the teen years are seen as a vacation from responsibility”*. The site, its conferences and books aim to encourage teens and young adults to strike a countercultural move against these low expectations, to urge youth to begin to build character and competence by moving out of their typical teenage 'comfort zones,' and embrace a willingness to *'get on and - do the hard things.'*

From personal reflection, what's fascinating to note here, is the apparent *cultural contradictions* at work in this area. At one level, youth today are the most *formally educated* of any previous generation, they're growing up faster, reaching *puberty* earlier, engaging in sexual '*exposure*' and '*activity*' younger, and experiencing greater *social, financial* and *technological* independence than ever before.¹²⁷ Over the last decade we've also witnessed the evolution of a new 'pre-teen' life stage, commonly referred to as –'*tweens*' (or 'tween-agers'), aimed at promoting and marketing the early development of younger children into a 'mini'

¹²³ Cole and Wright believe that the vast majority of teens, who call themselves Christians, haven't been well educated in religious doctrine and, therefore, really don't know what they believe. They believe that these results, at least to some degree, reflect the typically shallow theological culture of youth ministry. Cameron Cole and Dave Wright: *'Why Theology and Youth Ministry Seldom Mix'*: (Gospel Coalition Website: April 23rd, 2012) <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tqc/2012/04/23/why-theology-and-youth-ministry-seldom-mix/>. Likewise Kinnaman's American research discovered that overall, knowledge of scripture, doctrine or church history to be poor amongst most young Christians (not just amongst youth but adults in the church as well), With little understanding how faith could be a unifying feature of a life filled with purpose. That for many, the faith they held to was more akin to 'moralistic therapeutic deism', and that many were incapable of reasoning clearly about their faith or willing to take risks for Christ. Anecdotal evidence suggests there is some resonance with that finding within our local setting. Lost: p. 27f, 115, 120.

¹²⁴ Lost: p. 124.

¹²⁵ The term 'rebelution' - combining the words 'rebellion' and 'revolution'. The Rebelution: <http://www.therebelution.com/about/rebelution.htm>

¹²⁶ The Harrises state: *The Rebelution has really become a type of counter-cultural youth movement among Christian young people from around the country, and even around the world, who are not only rejecting the lies and the corruption of media-saturated youth culture, but they're returning to biblical and historical levels of character and competence...In 1 Timothy 4:12, the Apostle Paul tells Timothy, "Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity." In other words, as young people we are called to be exemplary in all areas of life. Our generation is falling incredibly short of that calling. Instead of serving as the launching pad of life, the teen years are seen as a vacation from responsibility."*

¹²⁷ See McCrindle Research: *'The First Generation Z's to Graduate High School in 2012'*: http://mccrindle.com.au/ResearchSummaries/2012/The-First-Generation-Zs-to-Graduate-High-School-in-2012_McCrindle-Research_250112.pdf. And *'Nettle's, Kippers, Twits & Downagers: Understanding the 21st Century Lifestyle Segments'*: www.mccrindle.com.au/ResearchSummaries/NETTELS-KIPPERS-TWITS-Downagers-Understanding-the-21st-Century-Lifestyle-Segments.pdf. Nicole Brady: *'Puberty Blues: the Trials of Young Girls Growing up Faster than Ever'*: (SMH: May 22, 2011) <http://www.smh.com.au/national/puberty-blues-the-trials-of-young-girls-growing-up-faster-than-ever-20110521-1ey0j.html>. And C. Ross: *Psychology Today: 'Overexposed and Underprepared: The Effects of Early Exposure to Sexual Content'*: (Aug 13th, 2012) <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/real-healing/201208/overexposed-and-under-prepared-the-effects-early-exposure-sexual-content>.

version of adolescence. All of this propelling children and teenagers into early adulthood long before they might be physically, emotionally, socially or psychologically ready.¹²⁸

At the same time, the post-teenage years seem to have been locked into a form of *suspended* and *delayed* adult onset, or 'failure to launch', with the period previously referred to as 'youth' having now extended from 18 or 21 - to 29, or even 30 - 35.¹²⁹ Within this so called -'Peter Pan Generation,' teenagers, young adults and 'adults' are staying longer in (or return to) the parental home, marrying older, starting families later, and all corresponding social and spiritual expectations appear to have been lowered.¹³⁰

We therefore must ask ourselves – how might this seemingly contradictory phenomenon impact, not only our ability to determine clear *expectations*, recognizable '*rites of passage*' and achievable *goals* for our children, teenagers and young adults, but also how we might now best approach the *social, emotional, psychological* and most significantly, *spiritual* development of our children and youth?

In conclusion, Kinnaman believes that for the church to now bridge the current cultural, relational and spiritual gaps in our youth and children's ministries we must begin to move away from, what he views as our - 'mass production faith development' approach to nurture and discipleship, to more *personalized* methods of disciple-making:

*"Taking our cues from public education, among other sectors of society, we have created a conveyor belt of development that industrializes the soul formation of young people-who eventually become adults with inch-deep, mile-wide faith. The outcome is adult Christians who were not transformed by their faith as children, as teens, or as young adults. How can we expect more after they turn forty?... Some are tempted to believe that spiritual effectiveness is connected to the size of our institutions and the sophistication of our content, but nothing could be further from the truth...does this infrastructure yield more and better discipleship automatically? Our research says no."*¹³¹

Kinnaman believes the church has unhelpfully embraced an *industrialized, mass-production, public-education approach* to faith development, creating a 'conveyor belt' of development that industrializes the soul formation of young people, who eventually become adults with inch-deep, mile-wide faith. The outcome is adult Christians who were not transformed by their faith as children, as teens, as young adults. Kinnaman compares this to Jesus' work with his disciples, which was characterized by life-on-life mentoring and apprenticeship, suggesting that there's a need to focus on going *deeper with a few*, rather than *superficially with many*.¹³²

*"...Caring about the faith journeys of young adults...there's a growing sense that we need new ways of discipleship, a new way of teaching, instructing, engaging, and developing the lives of young people. We need a new mind to focus on apprenticeship in the way of Jesus"*¹³³

¹²⁸ Mommyish: 'The Tween Epidemic: Encouraging Kids to Grow Up Too Fast Since 1997: <http://www.mommyish.com/2011/05/25/childrearing/the-tween-epidemic-encouraging-kids-to-grow-up-too-fast-since-1997>.

¹²⁹ The Globe and Mail: (10th Feb, 2012) 'Adulthood Delayed for Twentysomethings' <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/the-hot-button/adulthood-delayed-for-twentysomethings/article545227/>
The New York Times: (Aug 18th, 2010) 'What is it about 20-Somethings?' <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/22/magazine/22Adulthood-t.html?pagewanted=all>

¹³⁰ See section 1.4 in this research paper.

The Daily Mail: (19th July, 2012) 'The Generation Who Refuses to Grow Up' <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2176281/Generation-refuse-grow-No-mortgage-No-marriage-No-children-No-career-plan-Like-30-somethings-Marianne-Power-admits-shes-.html>

The Daily Mail: (15th Oct, 2012) 'Rise of the Peter Pan Generation':

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2217877/Meet-Peter-Pan-generation-Debt-ridden-living-home-lazy-make-bed.html>

¹³¹ Lost: p. 121.

¹³² Lost: p.121, 124.

¹³³ Lost: p.35. Ashton & Moon suggest this is particularly so in relation to conversion and follow up. Ashton & Moon believe that youth respond differently to adults and therefore have different needs in discipleship, that there's often an overemphasis on 'crusade style big events' as a successful method of evangelism or a call to conversion that does not often recognize the differences in youth evangelism from adult evangelism. There can often be large 'responses' made at youth rallies that may not always reflect genuine conversions. Youth need more time to 'grow into conversion' as a gradual process than

5. Realignment of Spiritual Responsibility:

"If parents let only the church teach the children about God then their children will not see a connection between church and real life" ¹³⁴

"It's important that all youth ministers gain a big picture perspective regarding the vital connection between youth and family...I've come to realize that I can have little long-lasting influence on a student's life if the parents aren't connected to the same spiritual transformation process that we're teaching at church" ¹³⁵

Literature, data research and Field Questionnaires all indicated significant concerns regarding the relationship and priority between church and family in regard to the spiritual nurture of children and teenagers. All sources came to very similar conclusions as to what were determined as 'best practice' principles in this regard.

The research affirmed the following:

a. Parents have prime responsibility and best influence:

All sources agree that the *primary* training ground for the discipleship and spiritual formation of children is within the Christian family rather than the local church. Scriptures teach that the core responsibility for raising children in the Lord belongs to families, and that fathers must take particular leadership (Gen 18:19, Deut 6:4-7, Prov 1:1-9, Eph 6:1-4, Col 3:20, 2Tim 1:5). In this regard youth and children's ministers (and their ministries) must be careful not to usurp that primary role.

Powell and Clark believe that it's not just a matter of *who* might carry prime responsibility, their research indicates, that despite changing cultural trends and divergent avenues of influence, it's *parents* who still influence the faith of children more than anyone, or anything, else. ¹³⁶ They also discovered, that more important than asking children spiritual questions, was the way parents actually expressed and lived out *their own faith* before their children: "*more than even your support, it's who you are that shapes your kid*". ¹³⁷

"The greatest gift you can give your children is to let them see you struggle and wrestle with how to live a lifetime of trust in God...as you faithfully hold on to the God who has taken hold of you, the life you live and model will be a beacon of hope and direction that no sin management faith can hope to achieve. As you trust the gospel, and the Lord who saves, your Sticky Faith will help your children discover their own Sticky Faith." ¹³⁸

The research also indicated that a parent's role is particularly to help children learn to *trust* God, and to understand that true faith is not all about 'doing' but primarily about *faith* in Christ and obedience as a *response* to that trust (Gal 5:6, Jn 6:28-29). Demonstrated particularly as the parents themselves proceed to live out and model their own faith and unswerving trust in God amidst all the disappointments, discouragements, changes and challenges of life. There's also a need for parents to model to their children an *unconditional, non-judgmental, ever-embracing* love across the challenging circumstances of life. ¹³⁹

Important to note here is that the scriptures also describe the '*church community*' as a family, the 'family of families' (e.g. 1Tim 3:15; 5:1-2). Parents must therefore aim to see their children grow into maturity in Christ

the typical adult might. What is needed is adequate youth discipleship and follow-up, ideally through long-term personal relationship investment and community group contact. Christian Youth Work: p. 84.

¹³⁴ Larry Fowler: Rock-Solid Kids: *Giving Children a Biblical Foundation for Life*: (Ventura: Gospel Light, 2004) p.10.

¹³⁵ Doug Fields: *Your First Two Years in Youth Ministry: a Personal and Practical Guide to Starting Right*: (El Cajon: Zondervan, 2002) p.104.

¹³⁶ Sticky Faith: p.21. In their research, participants were asked to rank five groups in terms of the quality and quantity of support received (friends inside youth group, friends outside, youth leaders, parents, adults in the congregation). The number one ranking was 'parents' p.23.

¹³⁷ Sticky Faith: p.24f & 184f. The authors note that even the best of spiritual parenting models may not always secure a child's ongoing faith, that ultimately it is the Holy Spirit, not us, that develops sticky faith in any individual p.28.

¹³⁸ Sticky Faith: p. 46-47.

¹³⁹ Sticky Faith: p.37.

and become fully formed adult members of the church, and not remain as spiritually (or emotionally) dependent children.

b. There is current misalignment:

However, (as section 3.4 in this paper has already indicated) what's increasingly recognized across the research is that although most parents realise they carry primary responsibility for their child's spiritual development and nurture, it is not always happening.¹⁴⁰ The missing ingredient in the discipleship of children today appears to be the family. As a result the church has increasingly operated as the *primary* means of spiritual development of youth and children, as parents have begun to relinquish or 'outsource' that role.

Larry Fowler in his book – '*Rock Solid Kids: Giving Children a Biblical Foundation for Life*', describes the current, and not altogether un-common, parent-church dynamic this way:

*"Together, parents and churches have settled into a destructive codependent relationship. Parents, with little inclination and few high quality resources to devote to the spiritual nurture of their children, have largely abdicated the job to the church. And the church had readily taken on a task that was originally mandated in Scripture to the parents of children."*¹⁴¹

Stanton believes this particular dynamic has often then resulted in an unhelpful self-perpetuating cycle:¹⁴²

*"Where we are is a self-perpetuating cycle: the discipling of young people has been handed over to professionals. Because the professionals are doing the work, parents no longer exercise their responsibility, and as a result they are inexperienced and ill-equipped to fulfill their responsibility. And because they are ill-equipped, parents seek more professionals to take care of the situation for them. And around we go...It sounds to me like the spiritual equivalent of the 'eating out' lifestyle? Where cafes and restaurants are full but our apartments no longer have kitchens? As our society is rediscovering the value of a home-cooked meal perhaps the church needs to rediscover the value of a home-discipled young person?"*¹⁴³

Research indicated that the apparent 'parental abdication' of spiritual responsibility might exist in different forms, and for very different reasons.

For example:

For some, abdication may take the form of a lack of *interest, understanding* or *engagement* in how the church is nurturing their children, or of making any personal appraisal of the effectiveness of those programs in doing so:

"Honestly, for many [parents] the kids ministry is just seen as babysitting, though for those of us doing it, we see it as Church for kids, a place to learn and grow, and worship God together in a way they understand" - Children's Minister: Sydney

"Generally, my vibe from other youth leaders is that parents are not really interested in our program and methodology. Many of our parents don't even know the names of our youth leaders" - Youth Minister: Sydney

¹⁴⁰ See section 3.4: '*Christian parents increasingly outsourcing spiritual instruction to the church*': in the first half of this research paper.

¹⁴¹ Larry Fowler: *Rock-Solid Kids: Giving Children a Biblical Foundation for Life*: (Ventura: Gospel Light, 2004) p.7.

¹⁴² Timothy P. Jones: *Perspectives on family Ministry: 3 Views*: (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009) p.16,. Jones references a Nationwide Barna Study conducted in 2003 indicating parents had largely given over the responsibility for the spiritual nurture and development of their children to the church, a responsibility that was impossible for the church to achieve alone - "*Unfortunately no matter how hard the church tries, it's incapable of bringing a child to complete spiritual maturity: that is the job of the family. The more willing churches are to play the co-dependent role in this drama, the less likely we are to see spiritually healthy families and a generation of young people who grow into mature believers*" (Parents Accept Responsibility for their Child's Spiritual Development but Struggle with Effectiveness) <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/120-parents-accept-responsibility-for-their-childs-spiritual-development-but-struggle-with-effectiveness>

¹⁴³ G. Stanton: '*Fast food youth Ministry*' (Sydney Anglican Website: March 8th: 2010).

“In the past we sent out newsletters covering youth issues and even ran seminars. But we stopped the seminars because they were so poorly attended even though the speakers were of a high standard, and the seminars ran at the same time as the kids were in their groups (i.e. about as easy as possible)” - Youth Minister: Sydney

For others, abdication may present itself as an overly simplistic parenting approach to the process of spiritual nurture:

“The relatively small group of parents who do talk with their kids about faith tend to default to asking: ‘what did you talk about in church today?’...‘how was youth group?’...‘what did you think of the sermon?’¹⁴⁴

Yet for others, their abdication has come about through sheer lack of confidence or know-how:¹⁴⁵

“The place where we most feel inadequate is the spiritual leadership of our kids, for most of us it wasn’t modelled and we don’t know what that looks like...how do you spiritually lead? And we hope someone else can do it. So when you show up at a church that employs a kids minister or sets up a ministry where there’s qualified Sunday School teachers or kids leaders, you’re desperately hoping they know more than you do”- Bruce Linton: Children’s Minister

One particular Barna study that concurred with Linton’s assessment, noted the following: *“The survey data indicate that parents generally rely upon their church to do all of the religious training their children will receive. Parents are not so much unwilling to provide more substantive training to their children, as they are ill equipped to do such work. According to the research, parents typically have no plan for the spiritual development of their children; do not consider it a priority, or have little or no training in how to nurture a child’s faith.”¹⁴⁶*

Fowler believes one answer to that particular concern, is, rather than embracing the church as another "service provider", the biblical mandate is that the home must continue to be the primary discipleship environment for children. Having said that, Fowler agrees that many parents are, or feel, inadequate for the task and therefore the responsibility of the "community/church" is to augment that training by equipping and teaching both parents and children alike. Fowler believes the Church can easily offer greater assistance to parents by:

1. Encouraging parents to have a *systematic* approach to training their children
2. Providing *take home materials* for parents to use with their children
3. Developing a ‘training in the home’ *support network* for parents
4. Providing parents with opportunities to *observe teachers* in *conversational instruction* to children
5. Using curriculums that have *long term plans* in teaching the Bible to children

Fowler believes that ‘*discipling children*’ **and** ‘*discipling parents to disciple children*’ should become the necessary components of every local church ministry.¹⁴⁷

c. A need for partnership:

“Our philosophy is that we are ‘facilitators’ in the Christian growth and education of children with parents playing the ‘primary’ role. It’s a partnership. Our role is trying to be strategic in supporting parents in their role, and then genuinely treating kids as members of the kingdom. The challenge is to teach in such a way that deflects away from the leaders, and towards the family. In the end I

¹⁴⁴ Sticky Faith: p. 72.

¹⁴⁵ See section 3.4: ‘*Christian parents increasingly outsourcing spiritual instruction to the church*’: in the first half of this research paper.

¹⁴⁶ George Barna: ‘*Parents Accept Responsibility for their Child’s Spiritual Development, but Struggle with Effectiveness*’: <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/120-parents-accept-responsibility-for-their-childs-spiritual-development-but-struggle-with-effectiveness>

¹⁴⁷ Rock Solid: p.10.

think you get a healthier family dynamic, a healthier church dynamic and kids that understand what it means to love Jesus”¹⁴⁸

The research affirmed that in order to turn the current misalignment around, their needs to be a genuine *partnership* formed between parents and those church ministries that share responsibility for the teaching, discipling and spiritual nurture of children and youth. This genuine partnership will require a realignment in spiritual responsibility, with the church existing to ‘*serve, support and supplement*’ the role of parents, as well as the need to put *intentional* discipling processes in place, based upon commonly agreed goals, strategies and shared information.

One research study indicated that not only was the resumption and realignment of parental responsibility alongside the church critical in achieving optimal spiritual nurture of children, but a secondary ‘spin-off’ in the development of greater parent-church partnership was an increase in the likelihood of stronger Christian maturity and greater longevity in the faith of children and teenagers:

“Ministries having the greatest success at seeing young people emerge into mature Christians, rather than contented church-goers, are those that facilitate a parent-church partnership focused on instilling specific spiritual beliefs and practices in a child’s life from a very early age. Sadly, less than one out of every five churches has produced such a ministry”¹⁴⁹

Reggie Joiner, of ‘*Think Orange*’ Ministries, believes that: “*what we should really be concerned about is our ‘collective’ ability to influence a generation to have a stronger, deeper, and more authentic relationship with God*”, that kids need parents who will help them advance their relationship with God, and parents need churches that will help them know how to be spiritual leaders.¹⁵⁰ But Joiner believes the problem is we’ve so divorced the ministry of parents and the church, not only do we no longer know *how* to form a combined partnership, but we also have *non-existent, undeveloped or ineffective* models of ‘family ministry’:

“We don’t really know how to partner with parents...[the church] believe that parents probably won’t assume responsibility for their own children’s spiritual growth, so they have tried to become a parent substitute”¹⁵¹

“There is a difference between doing something ‘for’ the family and doing something ‘with’ the family. Most churches are characterized by random acts of ministry to the family...Family ministry should not be another program you add to your list of programs. It should be the filter you use to create and evaluate what you do to influence children and teenagers”¹⁵²

Joiner and his ‘*Think Orange*’ team have attempted to rectify the parent-church disconnect by developing a process called ‘strategy integration’, synchronizing everything across the church under *one ministry team* called - ‘Family Ministry’. This team has oversight of everything relating to children through to young adults, as well as driving the master plan for partnering with parents (i.e. aligning ministry leaders and parents with

¹⁴⁸ Bruce Linton: Children’s Minister: Sydney.

¹⁴⁹ ‘*Spiritual Progress Hard to Find*’: Barna Research (December 22nd, 2003)
<http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/132-spiritual-progress-hard-to-find-in-2003>

¹⁵⁰ ‘*Think Orange*’ (‘*Orange-ology*’) arises from the conviction that the Church is not doing family ministry well, and families themselves are struggling to raise children under the pressures of modern society. Joiner calls for the church and family to join ‘*partnership*’ in the task of growing children & teenagers spiritually, and thereby greater strengthening the family unit. The concept of ‘*Orange*’ is the combining of ‘*red*’ (representing families, the heart and soul of society, where love, acceptance, sacrifice and relationships are primarily learnt) and ‘*yellow*’ (representing the Church called to shine the light of Christ) with the belief that God has created the Church and the family for specific purposes, but the effects of each are multiplied when combined together (i.e. not either/or but both/and). When the mix of red and yellow is right = orange. The two combined influences, of church and home, make greater impact than the 2 influences operating separately. R. Joiner: ‘*Think Orange: Imagine the Impact when Church and Family Collide...*’ (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook Publisher, 2009) p.165.

¹⁵¹ *Orange*: p.89.

¹⁵² *Orange*: p.83.

the same end in mind).¹⁵³

The aim is to engage parents in an integrated strategy, synchronizing the home and church around a clear message, recruiting mentors to become partners with families, and to mobilize the next generation to be the church. To this end, Joiner still uses a traditional, didactic, pedagogic model of ministry, with traditional *age-segregated peer group* programming.¹⁵⁴

Below are the 5 essential integration practices in the 'Orange' family ministry methodology:

1. *Integrating strategy across the church*: avoiding creating competing programmes and creating an integrated strategy from 'birth to graduation' (synchronising team, common language, strategic programs, relationships etc.)
2. *Refining* the bible message and *amplifying* what's important.
3. *Reactivating the family*: helping parents actively participate in the spiritual formation of their children. Providing initiatives across the curriculum for parents and families to complete at home, provide resources focusing on family time, hosting family events, forums etc. Working alongside parents across the spectrum of parental engagement with the church.
4. *Elevating Community*: every child is connected to a leader, addressing the need for 'multiple voices' in their life.¹⁵⁵
5. *Leveraging Influence*: creating opportunities for students to experience personal ministry and serving.

Similarly, Doug Fields in his book – '*Purpose Driven Youth Ministry: 9 Essential Foundations for Healthy Growth*' (PDYM) believes, that not only have we failed to adequately partner with parents, but we've also failed to develop true models of *family ministry*:

*"I was intimidated by parents of teenagers. Although unspoken, I felt an element of competition for students' time. I didn't view parents as partners, but as enemies who slowed down my plans to produce disciples...[but] Youth workers are becoming increasingly aware that a student-only youth ministry is less effective than a family-friendly youth ministry. Because we rarely see students in their family context, we often underestimate the power of the family"*¹⁵⁶

Fields notes that today's youth have only been exposed to *age-segregated* youth ministry, and believes youth are healthier when ministered to with their *whole family*, youth ministries that choose to exclude parents become less effective. Fields believes in order to more helpfully minister to youth over the long haul it's therefore critical that current churches intentionally develop a ministry to *entire families*.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Joiner believes that true family ministry is not about programs but rather, an effort to synchronize church leaders *and* parents *around a master plan* to build faith and character in their sons and daughters. Family ministries should develop the process that drives how both the church *and* the home combine their efforts to influence the next generation. Orange: p.83.

¹⁵⁴ Orange: p.83.

¹⁵⁵ Joiner is a strong believer in the importance and significance of Christian community in shaping the lives and growth of believers of all ages and stages. Joiner firmly believes that children (especially teenagers) need adult voices, coaches, leaders, mentors in their lives who will say things a Christian parent would say. It takes multiple influences to guard the faith of a generation, therefore parents need to widen the circle of influence for the sake their children's spiritual, relational and emotional growth. Joiner also believes that children, teenagers and young adults also need a consistent group of peer relationships. Orange: p.73.

¹⁵⁶ PDYM: p.253 & 251.

¹⁵⁷ PDYM: p.253.

In Field's particular *family ministry* model, he promotes taking intentional steps for the youth ministry to become more involved in family life, merging a more thorough going integration of youth ministry, church and family than many of the current 'family' models do.¹⁵⁸

In this regard, PDYM developed a series of progressive steps to build a stronger family focus:

1. *Creating a teamwork mentality*: developing strong ties and relationships between families, youth staff and the church.
2. *Clear communication*: regularly communicating youth information and updating parents.
3. *Family resourcing*: making books, videos available to parents, parent input nights etc.
4. *Peer family learning*: using other experienced parents to help give peer input and support to other parents.
5. *Designing family programs*: deciding what parts of the youth program might be converted into a 'family program.'
6. *Adding parents to volunteer teams*: bringing parents on to some of the youth leadership teams
7. *Offering parents a spiritual life plan*: working with individual parents to see how they might work together on a spiritual growth plan for their teenager using the same structure as the Saddleback '5' program.

Fields also believes that part of developing a partnering process for churches with youth and children's ministries is learning to *think differently* about the 'bigger picture'. Field suggests the following:¹⁵⁹

- * Change thinking of parents as *the enemy* to parents as *partners*.
- * From thinking 'my' ministry program to, '*how will this activity impact the families in church*'?
- * Reducing the number of youth group weeks and encouraging youth to *spend real time* at home with their families in those weeks.
- * *Communicate clearly* with parents: keep them informed.
- * Offer lots of help, input and support but don't *teach parents how to parent teenagers* unless you've had teenagers yourself.
- * Take time to develop a few strong relationships with *key parents* as a priority.
- * Reach out to *disconnected* parents.
- * Allow *parents to minister to parents*: have a volunteer parent organize family-friendly events and training times for their peers.

Lastly, in his book –*Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, Barna suggests, that as well as taking leadership into the home, effective children's ministries are those that insist on the regular participation of parents in the children's program, with an expectation that they invest a minimum number of days or hours, based upon their particular skills or gifts. Barna believes that the most effective children's ministries will also provide *weekly support materials* to help parents build on the teaching their children receive at church. He

¹⁵⁸ PDYM: p.252.

¹⁵⁹ Doug Fields: '*Your First Two Years in Youth Ministry: a Personal and Practical Guide to Starting Right*': (El Cajon: Zondervan, 2002) p.85.

also suggests there is significant value in considering offering ‘parent- teacher conferences’ to formalize the dialogue between home and church, to identify obstacles to spiritual growth, and inform parents of church curriculum purpose and direction.¹⁶⁰

Note: It’s important to note here that much of the literature acknowledges that a partnership between churches and *non-Christian* parents is also necessary, but the nature and practice of that partnership would require a slightly different approach and engagement.¹⁶¹

It’s also important to note that it’s very difficult to get a unanimously held definition of ‘family ministry’, nor is there a commonly agreed upon theological or practical methodology of approach. For further reflection on this particular issue read – ‘*Perspectives on Family Ministry: 3 Views*’ in the appendix section of this paper for further examples of different models and perspectives of ‘family ministry.’

6. Intergenerational (as opposed to multigenerational) Relationship Engagement:¹⁶²

“Build ‘social capital’ into your child’s life, creating a network of caring believers who will pray for, mentor, and bless your children with their presence over the course of their lives”¹⁶³

“In a culture that has severed ties between the generations, we need to include meaningful and intentional co-mingling of the generations at church”¹⁶⁴

An assumption held by most of the research material was that, now more than ever, the generations need one another. That alongside surrendering discipleship to professional ministers, church programs have become so radically age segregated that there’s now little *intergenerational contact* or broad *disciple-making interaction* within the faith community.

a. The generation gap:

The research suggested that although there are benefits and necessities in the targeted age segregation for the nurture and discipleship of children and youth, just as partnering with parents is critical for optimal growth and spiritual maturity, so too is the vital necessity for some kind of regular, consistent and intentional intergenerational engagement with other Christian adults.¹⁶⁵

“The assumption that only the young can reach the young must be questioned...The popular concept is that young people are best served by enjoying virtually exclusive contact with their peers while at church needs rethinking. The effective isolation of children and young people into peer groups means that their identity ends up being significantly shaped by the peer group...by encouraging minimal or insignificant contact with mature adults, there is the distinct possibility that young people will not grow up as quickly as they could or should...exposure to the life and gatherings of the rest of the church is essential, not optional”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁰ Transforming: p.111. Cosby also believes that it’s important that partnering with parents should not simply stop at communicating but also engaging them in participating or observing at some level within the youth ministry. Giving up the Gimmicks: p.17.

¹⁶¹ Stanton believes that believes that the responsibility and accountability is the same for unbelievers as well as believers and therefore every effort should be made to build relationships with these parents & invite them along to information nights etc. Graham Stanton (Zac Veron (ed): *Youth Ministry on the Front Foot*: (South Sydney: Anglican Youthworks, 2012) p.251.

¹⁶² The distinction made here, is that by ‘intergenerational’ we mean an *intentional proactive engagement* and *nurture* across generations, as opposed to the concept of ‘multigenerational’ which is the co-existence of various generations alongside each other without there necessarily being any pursuit of intentional ministry to one another or with one another.

¹⁶³ Sticky Faith: p.59.

¹⁶⁴ Perspectives: p.49.

¹⁶⁵ Interesting to note here is the intentional ‘intergenerational’ nature of ‘disciple-making’ we find depicted in both the old and the new testaments. For example: Gen 18:19, Deut 6:4-9, 11:18-21, Prov 22:6, Eph 6:4, 2 Tim 1:5, 3:14-15. The church is intended to have multigenerational fellowship for older members to take responsibility for the spiritual nurture of the young, and for the young to encourage the old.

¹⁶⁶ FAQs: p.19.

*“We have to be sure that we don't segregate the youth for our sake and theirs. They are part of the body of Christ too, and no part of the body can remain healthy if one of its members is cut off and put to the side. If we segregate the youth, not only do we lose all they have to teach us, but we also inadvertently teach them that the church is really only for adults - those who are married and have families of their own. And then we wonder why they don't get involved in church as college students or young singles, when in reality, we've been telling them all along that the church isn't yet for them”*¹⁶⁷

Likewise, Joiner:

*“A mother and father are not the only adult influences my children need”*¹⁶⁸

Joiner firmly believes in the importance and significance of the *Christian community* in shaping the lives and growth of believers of all ages and stages. Joiner believes that children (especially teenagers) need adult *voices, coaches, leaders, mentors* in their lives who will say things a Christian parent would say. That it takes *multiple* influences to guard the faith of a generation, therefore parents and churches need to *widen the circle of influence* for the sake their children's spiritual, relational and emotional growth.¹⁶⁹

Both the Francis and Richter study and the Barna research (outlined in 3.2 & 3.5 in this paper) found that an important factor in mitigating youth drop out rates was not continually *segregating* kids from adults in church, and intentionally *creating opportunities* that allow them to see adults practising their faith. (Interestingly, they also discovered that intergenerational contact and engagement for youth and children with those *younger* than themselves was also very important in faith development and longevity. Research suggested that students who *serve* and *build relationships* with younger children were also more likely to hang on to their faith).¹⁷⁰

Similarly, *'Sticky Faith'* argued that kids today have lost 'social capital' in that they're missing a handful of adults who care and are willing to pour themselves into their lives without a self-serving agenda. Sticky Faith argues, in a number of different ways, that meaningful *'intergenerational relationships'* are essential to a child's longevity in the church and overall spiritual vitality.¹⁷¹

Notably, corresponding research indicated that it's not only youth who are feeling the generation gap, but the 'twentysomething' group also felt isolated from parents and other older adults in the realm of faith and spirituality. Many feel older adults do not understand their doubts or concerns, and the majority of young people in this age bracket reported never having an adult *friend* other than their parents.¹⁷² This age group in particular appears to relish, not only diversity of ideas but also diversity of relationships. There's a yearning to both be mentored on one hand, yet also have the freedom, independence and scope to make it on their own.¹⁷³

Clark and Powell have suggested that what may be needed is a new *5:1 ratio* i.e. instead of thinking 1 leader for every 5 kids and teenagers, we need to be thinking: *“5 adults to every 1 kid, adults of all ages whom we recruit to invest in each child in little, medium or big ways, building a 'sticky web of relationships' for our children.”*¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁷ 'Youth need the church and the church need youth': Mark Howard (Gospel Coalition Website: April 30th, 2012). <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/04/30/youth-need-the-church-and-the-church-needs-youth/>

¹⁶⁸ Orange: p.44.

¹⁶⁹ Joiner also believes that children teenagers and young adults need not only the solid Christian influence of parents, leaders, coaches and mentors but also a consistent group of solid peer relationships. Orange: p.73.

¹⁷⁰ Sticky Faith: p.98.

¹⁷¹ Sticky Faith: p.98f. Powell & Clark note, that with the advent of Facebook, Skype and other new technologies, even distance need not be a barrier to building a sticky web across an 'extended' family.

¹⁷² Lost: p.29.

¹⁷³ Kinnaman refers to this dual desire as the 'me-and-we' contradiction. Lost: p.29.

¹⁷⁴ Sticky Faith: p.98.

b. A new approach needed:

“...the question of integration has far more to do with relationships than coinciding in a particular place”¹⁷⁵

Like many others, Kinnaman believes the lack of consistent, intentional intergenerational engagement is a significant gap in the current *disciple-making process*; in order to bridge this gap a radically new approach is needed in the way we structure and develop our church ministry:

“We must ask ourselves whether our churches and parishes are providing the rich environments that a relationally oriented generation needs to develop deep faith...I believe we need a new mind to measure the vibrancy and health of the intergenerational relationships in our faith communities.”¹⁷⁶

Kinnaman’s desire is to see older Christians, parents and peers recognize their *collective calling* to love, accept, partner with the next generation, and find new ways to make disciples among this generation.¹⁷⁷ To that end, Kinnaman and others have suggested the following:

1. Rethink the concept of ‘generations’:

Kinnaman believes the Christian community is one of the few places where those who represent the full scope of human life (from cradle to grave) come together with a *singular motive* and *mission*. In a misguided following of public school instructional models, Kinnaman believes many churches have allowed themselves to become internally segregated by age, unintentionally contributing to the rising tide of *alienation* that defines our times, as well as resulting in our youth’s *enthusiasm* and *vitality* being segregated off from the *wisdom* and *experience* of their elders.¹⁷⁸

Kinnaman suggests we therefore need a new way of thinking about relationships, generations and generational relationships, that the church must recapture the biblical concept of ‘a generation’, and one that more adequately reflects the *living organism* called the church and its heavenly reality (Heb 12:22-24):

“I have come to believe that we in the church must recapture the biblical concept of a generation... you assume the church is a collection of separate generations, with the older generations given the responsibility of raising young people...but there is a much bigger reality. A generation is every living person who is fulfilling God’s purposes...everybody in the church at a particular time make up a ‘generation’, a generation that is working together in their time to participate in God’s work... The church is a partnership of generations fulfilling God’s purposes in their time”.¹⁷⁹

The belief here, is that rather than assuming the church to be a collection of ‘separate generations’, with the older generations given the responsibility of raising young people, the Bible’s view is that everybody in the church at any particular time, together make up a ‘generation’, a generation that’s called upon to *work together* to participate in God’s work. Rather than assuming the church exists to prepare the next generation to fulfil God’s purposes, the church should be a ‘*partnership of generations*’ fulfilling God’s purposes in their time i.e. with *one* single motive and mission.

In this way, churches might not do away with children’s or youth ministry, but these programs would be re-evaluated and revamped to make intergenerational relationships a priority. Kinnaman believes that

¹⁷⁵ FAQ’s: p.120.

¹⁷⁶ Kinnaman’s research discovered that most young adults do not recall having a meaningful friendship with an adult or adult mentor through their church. That Churches are failing to provide the rich environments that this relationally oriented generation needs to develop deep faith. Kinnaman believes that this is a critical ‘gap’ in the disciple-making process that must be addressed if we are to adequately respond to youth drop out in our churches. Lost: p.120.

¹⁷⁷ Lost: p.34.

¹⁷⁸ Lost: p.203.

¹⁷⁹ Lost: p.203.

'flourishing intergenerational relationships' should distinguish the church from the other cultural institutions of our time.

2. Recognise the place and importance of older Christians:

Across the literature, the critical place and importance of relationships with older Christians (beyond the home) for the spiritual nurture and maturity of children, teenagers and young adults was repeatedly emphasised.

Fields' believes that relationships are the key draw card for teenagers and young adults and therefore need to take high priority, especially relationships with adults who *"make building relationships with students a high priority, these relationships quicken the ministry's effectiveness and enhance students' spiritual maturity"*.¹⁸⁰

Likewise, in his book *'Youth Ministry on the Front Foot'*, Veron notes: *"...rather than working hard at helping youth make the transition, work hard at having genuine overlap between the life-stages by knocking down the paddock fences. Encourage rich relationships across the multi-generational people of God"*¹⁸¹

Veron suggests there may still be different programs for different groups but with more multigenerational *connection and engagement* e.g. bringing teenagers and adults together for socializing, camps, final terms of transition, enabling youth involvement and engagement in evening services etc. thereby enabling the breadth of adult contact, interaction and support to act as an extended spiritual family to that of the home.

3. Inclusion of parents and older adults on leadership teams:

Both the literature and specialist interviews raised the value of including parents and older adults on children and youth leadership teams:

"You need a variety of age groups involved in the kid's ministry leadership (not just uni/school age group). For example, parents have a vital role in bringing experience and maturity, and they play a crucial role, not only with the kids but also with the younger leaders. Maturity is needed to give balance, and breadth of age helps the growth of young leaders.

The ideal is to have older and younger leaders paired in partnership with each other. They become 'mentors' for the kids and mentors for the leaders. And not just mentors in relation to children's ministry but also in how to be a husband/wife or father/mother, which is so vital for young people and makes their leadership experience fuller. It helps them grow in godliness and wisdom.

*It also needs to be a 'family' experience so that kids can see people of all ages following Jesus. Otherwise what the child sees is that you stay Christian until you are about 21 and then it drops off, and that Christians older than 30 have nothing to contribute. This is a bad model to see. They need to see there can be a passion for God, people and others their whole life"*¹⁸²

Likewise, Moser and Vernon also believe it's important to have youth leadership teams that span generations, not just the immediate age above:

"Some of the best leaders around are actually a lot older than the norm. We often fall into the trap of thinking that a good leader is a young leader because they "can relate so well to the young people." This is often misguided. Young people need leaders who will love them, listen to them,

¹⁸⁰ PDYM: p.195.

¹⁸¹ Front Foot: D. Miers, p.138.

¹⁸² Bruce Linton.

*and show them Christ. Your age may be a minor detail. Besides, most kids can't tell the difference between 25 and 55. If you are over 21, you are ancient!"*¹⁸³

The belief here is that something is seriously wrong if all leaders and mentors of children and youth are only ever drawn from within the late teen or twenty-something age bracket. The Bible itself often couches discipleship in *multigenerational terms* (e.g. Titus 2:1-8), suggesting that a *network* of *spiritual* grandparents, couples, college students, single adults, empty nesters, and widowers all provide the richest and most effective context for discipleship outside a biological family unit.

4. Recognise the power and importance of peer leadership:

*"We need younger leaders...young Christians who are motivated by godly concern for their own generation, who speak the language of their peers are sorely needed...because today's twentysomethings are living through discontinuously different social, technological and spiritual change"*¹⁸⁴

Kinnaman believes that the influence of technology, pop culture, media, entertainment, science, and an increasingly secular society are intensifying the differences between the generations. That many churches, leaders, and parents (the established generation) have a difficult time understanding these differences, much less relating to the values, beliefs and assumptions that have spawned them. What is therefore needed, for both teenagers and young adults, are intergenerational relationship influences that include solid Christian '*peer leadership*', those young spiritually mature youths who are motivated by a *godly concern for their own generation*.

Kinnaman states, that young leaders who *speak the language of their peers* are sorely needed because today's twentysomethings are not just slightly or incrementally different from previous generations, but they're living through '*discontinuously different*' social, technological and spiritual change.¹⁸⁵ As already mentioned, Alex and Brett Harris's 'Rebelution' Movement is one such example of the power and importance of Christian peer leadership.

5. Inclusion in congregational life:

Research suggested that another important way of bridging the intergenerational gap is that we must find ways to actively and intentionally *include* children, teens and young adults into the *congregational life of the church*, rather than relegating them to back rooms or back pews.¹⁸⁶ Both teenagers and young adults today need meaningful '*rites of passage*' such as confirmation, inclusion in praying, serving and bible reading in church, as well as being given specific disciple-making responsibilities such as visiting the sick, teaching children, training in mentoring and discipling those younger etc.¹⁸⁷

It's Joiner's belief that the spiritual formation of children and teenagers is closely connected to the act of *servicing* in particular. That if we fail to help kids make a practical investment of time and energy into serving

¹⁸³ Changing The World: p.100.

¹⁸⁴ Lost: p.35.

¹⁸⁵ Kinnaman makes a strong argument that the next generation is different because '*our culture is discontinuously different*'. The cultural setting in which young people have come of age is significantly changed from what was experienced during the formative years of previous generations. Today's youth are being formed under the direct influence of fast paced changes such as the use of free markets, media, advertising, technology, politics, sexuality etc. as our lab tools, the results of which generate incredible fluidity, diversity, complexity and uncertainty in its wake. Kinnaman states that the whole of society is impacted in some way by this rapid change, with 'sixty-something's' living in the same *discontinuously different* culture as the twenty-something's, the critical difference being that Seniors, Boomers & Busters, to some extent, came of age *before* these momentous changes had reached maximum velocity and critical mass. Lost: p.35 & 38.

¹⁸⁶ Lost: p. 122.

¹⁸⁷ Slater makes the point that we need to allow young people and children to make a contribution to the life of the church. That when Paul writes of the gifts of the risen Jesus has entrusted to the church, there's no indication that the works of service produced by these gifts are restricted to those over eighteen. The use of gifts is also a great way to cultivate right attitudes and maturity in the young. FAQ's: p.122. Likewise Fields believes that the sign of a healthy church is one that helps *all* Christians, regardless of age, to discover their gifts and express them through serving in ministry. Our role as leaders is to follow the pattern set out in Eph 4:11-12 and help prepare *all* God's people for works of service. PDYM: p.177.

others, their hearts will never mature to care for others (particularly as students transition towards high school and college).¹⁸⁸ Both children and teenagers need consistent *practical opportunities* to develop their faith, and *guided hands on encounters with ministry* that give them a personal sense of God's mission, and opportunities to influence others growth in the kingdom.¹⁸⁹

6. Recognising the 'family of families' principle:

Lastly, we must always remember that the Church exists, not as separate biological family units, but primarily (and more significantly) as a spiritual home, a *family of families*, where each one is a brother, sister, mother or father, and as such, each has responsibility *to* and *for* the nurture and discipleship of one another:

*"As a family, or the Family of families, the church community is where teenagers can see models of godly decision making in the young adult 'older brothers and sisters'; where they can learn from models of long term faithfulness in the elder 'grandparents in the faith'; where young people from broken and divided homes can find role models and advocates in spiritual parents".*¹⁹⁰

Alongside the biological family, Beckwith believes the broader church family and peers must all play a vital and necessary role in the spiritual formation of children and teenagers today. All 3 spheres have the potential to powerfully nurture faith formation. The Church's challenge is to find creative ways to bring that potential to fruition. She espouses the need for *bringing the generations together* as a family, and congregations as places where life can be shared, relationships grow, experiences shared, as well as a visible and tangible means of tempering the prevalent ageism.¹⁹¹

Note: For two examples of church models that have attempted to address the intergenerational issue, read – '*Perspectives on Family Ministry: 3 Views*' in the appendix section of this paper. More particularly, note the '*Family-based*' philosophy and the '*Family equipping*' model.

7. Transitions and The Need for 'Strategic Flow':¹⁹²

*"I wish there was more of a transition.
It seemed like when I was done with high school, everything ended really fast"*¹⁹³

*"In most churches it seems like we are disconnecting when the stakes are the highest...
we are not tapping into the relational influence when the felt need is the greatest"*¹⁹⁴

As this research paper has already indicated, there is significant youth loss and disengagement from the church and Christian activity once young people leave school and hit their 20's, with various reasons posited

¹⁸⁸ Orange: p.206.

¹⁸⁹ It is important to note here that some of the marks of being a true follower of Christ are the call to a life of obedience, sacrifice, servanthood and suffering (Deut 10:12, Matt 16:24-25, 28:20, Mk 8:34-35, Lk 14:25-27, Jn 14:15-24, Eph 4:12, 1Pet 4:9 - 11, Phil 1:29, 2Cor 1:5) as well as the command to specifically demonstrate love to the brethren, and to obey the 'one another' commands (1Jn, 3:21-24,4:7, Gal 6:10). Therefore it is important to instil, not only this understanding, but also its practice, in our children from the earliest age.

¹⁹⁰ G. Stanton: '*Mickey Mouse Youth Ministry*' (Sydney Anglicans Website: Feb. 22nd, 2010)
http://sydneyanglicans.net/ministry/modernministry/mickey_mouse_youth_ministry

¹⁹¹ Formational: p.131f. Interestingly, Kinnaman makes the observation from his data that young adults' ability to grow in faith withers when they persist in narcissism, entitlement, and out of proportion self-confidence. His belief is that many youth have an unrealistic self-assessment that's aided and abetted by a culture that glorifies youth as inherently beautiful, valuable, and wise. The marketing media obsession with youth and young adults has led to two negative consequences: 1. It reinforces the very modern notion that the next generation must be catered to before all else. 2. It fuels the damaging misperception that older people don't have much value to offer younger generations, thereby increasing generational fragmentation in our cultural imagination, and contributing to the shallowness of the generation. Lost: p.117.

¹⁹² The phrase- 'strategic flow' was first coined by Ken Moser in his book - '*Changing The World Through Effective Youth Ministry*'. Moser believes it's critical for a ministry to develop strategic transitions, bridges or 'flow' of youth from younger to older groups and life stages p. 9, 36.

¹⁹³ Sticky Faith: p.149.

¹⁹⁴ Think Orange: 9.2.

for this loss (see 3.2 & 3.3). As well as reasons already noted, general research suggested that many of the core issues surrounding youth drop out rates is the general feeling of being *ill-equipped, over protected and unprepared for transition*.

a. Ill-equipped, overprotected and unprepared:

*“According to students themselves, most don’t feel set up for success in the transition to college. This is especially tragic given our research showing that feeling prepared matters. The more students feel prepared – whether it be to find a church, engage in a ministry, make friends, or how to handle new choices about alcohol, sex and parties – the more likely their faith is to grow”*¹⁹⁵

Barna’s “exit interviews” with teenagers indicated that the *spiritual foundation* laid by families and churches when they were younger was often *inadequate* (e.g. comparatively few early teens indicated they learned enough Bible content to enable them to make important life decisions on the basis of biblical principles). Further, it also became apparent that some teenagers had already made up their minds that once they become independent of their parents they would abandon church.¹⁹⁶

Further research also indicated that the current culture of *cloistering, ‘over-managing’ and overprotecting* children (physically, practically or emotionally) was also a contributing factor for youth *unpreparedness* for the challenges that lie ahead. Kinnaman found that ‘helicopter parenting’ (and/or ‘velcro’ parenting) and the overall cultural fixation on ‘safety and protectiveness’ was having a profound effect on the church’s ability to disciple the next generation.¹⁹⁷ Jenny Brown’s book *“Growing Yourself Up”* captures the overprotection fixation well:

*“It seems that the more frantic the pace of life becomes, and the more anxiety mounts about our uncertain future, the more society panders to its children. There is less space for children to think and solve problems for themselves, as both parents and schools manage their schedules for them...meanwhile many children are less able to take a stand for themselves against schoolyard teasing; they are less able to direct their own learning efforts; and when adolescence arrives, they are ill prepared for managing their new freedoms responsibly”*¹⁹⁸

Kinnaman’s research discovered that many young Christians feel overprotected, shielded from failure and regret, fearful of, and detached from the world, and unprepared for the life issues they face. Though presenting with *outward confidence*, in reality the prevalence of youth ‘over-management’ only served to increase their sense of general insecurity, lack of *internal confidence* and self-doubt. Consequently, neither are they emotionally, or spiritually, prepared for a life of risk, independence, adventure or service to God – a God who asks them to lay down their lives for his kingdom.¹⁹⁹

In this regard, Brown and Condie have the following insightful comments to make:

*“...the parenting challenge in the midst of this rush is to take over their children’s capacities to soothe their upsets and solve their problems...if you’re going to assist your child to grow their resilience, the first step will be to increase your own resilience in tolerating your own child’s upset without feeling compelled to rush in and smooth over everything for them”*²⁰⁰

“From a very young age, we can be teaching our children how to deal with life when things don’t go our way. We don’t have to make our children feel better, nor do we need to rescue them. This is

¹⁹⁵ Sticky Faith: p.151.

¹⁹⁶ Barna: *‘Spiritual Progress Hard to Find’*: (December 22nd, 2003).

¹⁹⁷ Sticky Faith describes the Velcro parent(s) as those who find it impossible to detach and enable independence. Those who have forgotten the principle: *don’t do for a child what they should be learning to do for themselves*. P. 158.

¹⁹⁸ Jenny Brown: *‘Growing Yourself Up: How to Bring Your Best to All of Life’s Relationships’* (Exisle Publishing: Wollombi, 2012) p. 107-108.

¹⁹⁹ Kinnaman notes that this overprotectiveness can lead youth to look for excitement outside traditional boundaries e.g. sex, drugs, thrill seeking etc. or other forms of spirituality. Lost: p.98-100.

²⁰⁰ Growing Yourself Up: p.108.

*the challenge...to equip our children to deal with the blows of life, and to develop resilience. In Psalm 13: 1-6... David models a way of dealing with despair and a difficult season in life that is wise and godly. We can begin helping our children deal with the disappointments, frustrations, hurts and sadness's that will inevitably come their way. They are a part of living in a broken world"*²⁰¹

b. Critical moments and issues of concern:

*"We have to face the reality that the college-age years are the biggest disconnecting point for people. Church leaders talk about this problem, but few have developed a strategy that bridges the disconnection"*²⁰²

Research tells us there are several key 'transition moments' in the movement towards adulthood and independence that demand careful attention, intentional preparation and supportive oversight e.g. primary to high school, school leavers at year 10, high school to university and university to work. One of the most critical in the life transition process is providing adequate support, preparation and transition from *school to university*, particularly in the *first two weeks*:

*"Over and over, students have told us that the first two weeks at college are when they make key decisions about drinking and other high-risk behaviours, right along with choosing whether to go to church or to a campus ministry...many of these decisions are influenced by the new friends and situations in which they put themselves. Most kids are unprepared for the intensity of those first few days and weeks and have no strategy for how to make decisions during that critical time"*²⁰³

The research noted that the first 2 weeks of college were when students tended to make key decisions about drinking and other high-risk behaviours, including whether to go to church or campus ministry. Many decisions made during that time are highly influenced by new friends, new living circumstances and new environment.

For many, the lack of adequate *practical preparation* for independent living also means that just managing daily life became overwhelming and all consuming:

*"Facing the sudden instability of the new environment, schedule, and virtually limitless boundaries, operating from day to day becomes a practice of sheer survival...nearly half of students in our study felt anxious that so much was suddenly up to them to decide...We also found students struggle most to integrate their faith with their handling of time and money"*²⁰⁴

Though research indicates that engaging in a church or campus ministry during the first year makes a big difference in supporting the transition process, most young teenagers also felt totally unprepared for the intensity of that zone and had no clear strategy for how to find a church or how to make decisions during that time. Finding a new church fell among the top 3 most difficult parts of the transition.²⁰⁵

*"Compared to high school, I know more about myself and less about what I believe than I used to. I hope this will resolve at some point in my life...at this point it's on hold because I don't have the time or the tools. It's hard to find time to think about religion or God, and college feels more like living from one day to the next and losing focus on big picture things."*²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ Sarah Condie: 'A Wise Mum Helps Her Children Deal With the Stuff of Life' (Growing Faith Website; Dec 12, 2012)

²⁰² Think Orange: 9.3.

²⁰³ Sticky Faith: p.151. Sticky Faith has some excellent suggestions for parents in helping them more adequately prepare their teenager for transition and independence. See pages 154f.

²⁰⁴ Sticky Faith: p.153.

²⁰⁵ Fewer than 40% of students felt prepared to find a new church. Only 40% of youth group alum attending an on-campus fellowship once a week or more, with 57% attending church once a week or more. Sticky Faith: p.152.

²⁰⁶ Sticky Faith: p.153.

One last issue of concern for youth in the transition process was the intense sense of 'loneliness' they often felt, especially in the lack of ability to initiate, search out or make 'new friends'.

Research in the States indicated that only 1 in 7 graduating students felt very prepared for what college would bring, but the more prepared they felt (to find church, make friends, handle new choices) the more likely their faith is to grow.²⁰⁷

c. Threefold support and the need for 'strategic flow':

Research suggested that the *threefold* strand of *parents*, the *church* and older *adult mentors* all have a critical and strategic place to play in helping youth through the difficult transition process.

Parents:

Research found that contact with parents, whether by phone, email or text, is strongly related to practical and emotional adjustment to college. This was true regardless of who made the contact.²⁰⁸

Given the research indicating that the first two weeks set the trajectory for the rest of college, parents can help their teenager create a 'first two-week plan' as a road map to start their journey.

Parents can also help prepare their child by actively nurturing and encouraging healthy independence, helping to research potential new churches, openly talking about spiritual life and life after high school, helping them grieve losses and change, talking about money and managing money, processing their own feelings about change, 'loosening the ties' as parents, and learning to trust God with their child.²⁰⁹

Adult mentors:

Research suggested that intergenerational mentors can help by continuing to keep contact with teenagers post high school. Research indicated that contact with at least one adult from the congregation *outside* the youth ministry during the first semester of college is linked with the likelihood of stickier faith.²¹⁰ Hearing from an adult mentor from their home church, whether by text, email or phone helped students take their faith to college with them, and that contact would continue to make a difference three years later. Research suggests that for greatest effect, these intergenerational mentor relationships are best started long before teenagers exit a church.

The church:

Moser believes it's critical for a youth ministry to develop strategic transitions, bridges or 'flow', of youth from younger to older groups and stages:

*"Flow is where a successful younger group can lead to the development of an older group. In a perfect world, there would be a vibrant Sunday school from which children would flow into a junior high group; that could lead into a senior high group and then move on to an 18+/university group...the combination of flow and reaching out through evangelism is the great double barrel of growth. The simple and most effective rule for numerical growth is to keep what you've got!"*²¹¹

Moser suggests the following as ways to bridge transition and create flow:²¹²

1. Having *leaders* move up with kids for a time to aid transition to the next stage

²⁰⁷ Sticky Faith: p.151

²⁰⁸ Sticky Faith: p.154.

²⁰⁹ Powell and Clark list 6 losses we can help teenagers grieve; material, relationship, loss of a dream, functional, role and systemic loss. Sticky Faith: p. 164.

²¹⁰ Sticky Faith: p.100 & 178.

²¹¹ Changing The World: p.9. See also p.36.

²¹² Changing The World: p.38f.

2. Making sure there's 'flow' at *the right time*: making the transition a few months before the end of the leaving year so that momentum is not lost over summer
3. *Preparing kids beforehand*: priming them about the group they're moving up to and having future leaders visit them in their current group. Enabling kids to visit/observe the group meeting they're moving on to
4. *Preparing the group they're transitioning to*: helping them be excited about change and welcoming new members, encouraging them to take responsibility for the newer members coming through
5. *Beware of program 'shock'*: where there may be a clash of styles between the previous group and the one they're transitioning to (especially if that is church)

One pastor has suggested that what's needed to ease the difficult transition process is '*college friendly churches*', that people cannot become spiritually mature unless they stay *intimately connected* to other believers, therefore we must strategically develop church structures that promote intimate connection. The first step is making sure our structures support people through *all the life stages*.

This pastor suggests that churches that truly engage college-age people have a structure that's strategic beyond just creating a separate service; they've developed a *lifelong discipleship process* by intentionally *connecting people of all generations*. These churches embrace at least seven crucial characteristics:²¹³

1. Leaders place a high priority on *cross-generational relationships*
2. Leaders cultivate a heart in older mature believers for *discipleship* of younger believers, and *hold them to the standard* (2Tim 2:2, Tit 2:3-4)
3. Student ministry leaders *express respect* for older adults in church. There is mutual respect between ministers of children and ministers who work with the adult congregation
4. No leader is on an island. They view themselves as a small part in the *lifelong discipleship* of people
5. Leaders *work alongside parents* and strategically do so from the nursery through the college-age years
6. College-age individuals have a leader who works in an *assimilation role* to connect college-age people with more experienced believers
7. College-age individuals have a leader who understands the search for identity, intimacy, meaning, pleasure, and truth during the college years and is able to disciple people toward *biblically mature conclusions* in each area

Research also suggests recognising and celebrating critical of 'rite of passage' moments by parents, adult mentors and churches alike are powerful opportunities to aid the transition process and guide teenagers and young adults into the next phase of life, ministry and maturity.²¹⁴

d. The 'birth to graduation' approach:

The Orange-ology philosophy considers transitions to be critical moments for children, teenagers and young adults. One of the 5 essentials in the Orange philosophy and methodology is to manage those critical

²¹³ The Pastors belief is that some leaders have attempted to build a bridge for this disconnection by developing another church service. But even if this attracts hundreds of college-age people, it doesn't necessarily solve the core problem. From a college-age student's perspective, this approach could only just contribute to further disconnection. This model actually exposes the differences between people, not the similarities. Therefore, in order for true connection to take place another approach is needed. Think Orange: 9.3.

²¹⁴ Note this article: <http://stickyfaith.org/articles/through-the-zone>

transition points by integrating 'Family Ministry' across the church, including through to the *young adult years of 18-25*. The aim is to avoid creating competing programmes and to create a single integrated ministry approach from 'birth to graduation'.²¹⁵

By using one integrated strategy and curriculum the aim is not only to simplify the church program and calendar, but also to plan for the crucial 'transition' stages from childhood to teenager, teenager to college student. The Orange integrated curriculum extends to the age of 25, with specially prepared materials targeting key transition issues and concerns, thereby encompassing the broader scope of 'youth and young adults ministry' in one seamless program of approach.²¹⁶

8. Training and Support:

"Next to the kids in your group, your most important asset is your leadership team. If you want to build an effective youth ministry that will be around long after you're gone, you must develop good, effective leaders.

*The role of the leader is to help the people they lead to grow in their relationship with Jesus. Leaders are not there to facilitate fun, provide crowd control or to entertain the masses. They are to be servants, mentors and role models"*²¹⁷

Research unanimously agreed that the training, equipping and support of volunteer leaders were critical to effective on-going youth and children's ministries. In fact, all authors would go so far as to say that the quality of a youth or children's ministry will only ever be as good as the quality of its leadership:

*"A group can only be as good as its leaders. The quality of leadership will have an enormous bearing on the quality of the group. This means that the way we go about choosing and training our leaders will be absolutely critical"*²¹⁸

*"Good young leaders will attract other good young leaders! Good and clear gospel programs with good training provided will also attract quality leadership. To attract and retain quality people into the ministry will require that the ministry be clearly gospel focused and not just child minding"*²¹⁹

In this regard, all authors in the literature review agree that it's 'character over charisma' that must always be the defining element of choice in leadership recruitment: *"leaders are not chosen because their bodies are pierced in all the right places, or because they have all the right tattoos. Read carefully through 1 and 2 Timothy and the book of Titus. You will see here that we must use people of solid Christian character and commitment. They are not necessarily people who can run around with the kids or who look good."*²²⁰ Rather, what's most important is not age, energy or extrovert enthusiasm, but leaders who will model Christ to the up and coming generation of believers.²²¹

Petty believes that in a discipleship youth ministry, recruiting, training and developing the best leaders is of the highest priority, volunteer leaders are the 'engine room' that drives the whole youth program and

²¹⁵ It's interesting to note that Moser also defines 'youth' as the period just before the teens through to graduation at 21 or 22. Changing The World: p.9.

²¹⁶ The book 'Think Orange' also raises good ideas on transitioning (note particularly the sections 9.2 & 9.3). The Orange website also provides full resources (notably -XP3 college) particularly to help the transition process from high school to college, with 'Next Generation Guides' for mentors and small group leaders. See: <http://stickyfaith.org/student-curriculum>. Also see: <http://www.covchurch.org/resources/real-life-field-guide/>. Sticky Faith also lists several ideas as well as online resources they've prepared in helping to improve transitioning processes. P.166f.

²¹⁷ Changing the World: p.99.

²¹⁸ No Guts: p.55.

²¹⁹ Bruce Linton: Previous Children's Minister.

²²⁰ Changing the world: p.100.

²²¹ Changing the World: p.100-101.

therefore careful selection, training and oversight of volunteers must always be the key task of any youth or children's minister.²²²

Likewise, in following, what he believes is Jesus' model with his disciples, Field considers the core responsibility of the youth or children's minister is to focus on the oversight, discipleship and development of volunteer leaders. To this end, all volunteer leaders are led through the following leadership strategy:²²³

1. Modelled - Christian leadership
2. Mentored - in leadership development
3. Monitored - in their growth as leaders
4. Motivated - through regular feedback
5. Encouraged - to multiply their effectiveness by sharing their skills with others.

Veron also believes that the most important resource for the ministry is giving priority to developing the leadership team, especially in a *discipling capacity*. It is the volunteer leaders who will ultimately be those who nurture and equip the youth to *be disciples who make disciples*, therefore any leadership 'coaching' must function more as a *shared life of discipleship*, a sharing and modelling Christian faith together.

For Veron, the spiritual maturity of the leadership team will determine the spiritual health growth and vitality of the ministry; therefore developing a leadership team must always involve intentional coaching in these 3 core areas:²²⁴

1. Ensuring leaders understand and are committed to the gospel vision of the work.
2. Providing resources to leaders and assisting with skills.
3. Encouraging leaders spiritual health and development.

Lastly, the research confirmed that the youth and children's ministries that flourished most were those that focused energy on the present whilst keeping a watchful intentional eye on the future. These ministries were constantly on the look out to develop potential up-and-coming leaders with a long-term approach to growing them in Christ, fostering a disciple-making attitude and nurturing their leadership potential.²²⁵

²²² In Petty's model, all leaders are expected to attend a weekly 'core leaders' bible study where they are disciplined together as a group. Through the experience of this leadership group they in turn are modelled in how to best disciple, teach and nurture others. As with their youth Bible studies, the core group is also taken through a three year leader's curriculum consisting of 4 key areas: personal faith, theology, gifts and ministry as well as practical skills training. Petty has also developed a '*New Leaders' Package*' explaining their philosophy of ministry, standards required of leaders and application forms for new leaders. Playbook: p. 54, 60 & 98. See also: Changing the World, for suggestions on how to run a leader's Bible study. P.102f.

²²³ PDYM: p.191.

²²⁴ Irving views this coaching more as a shared life of discipleship, sharing and modelling Christian faith, as well as general group equipping. *Front Foot*, p270.

²²⁵ Moser believes that most youth groups have the future leadership team in their midst, they just need nurture, encouragement and training. Good leaders also do not view age as a barrier to leadership selection and recruitment, falling into the trap of believing that only the young can effectively minister to the young. Changing the World: p.100-101.

- APPENDIX -

Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church:

M. Senter (ed), W. Black, C. Clark & M. Nel: ²²⁶

Thesis: We are failing youth in evangelism, discipleship and non-incorporation:

In his introductory chapter, Mark Senter sets the backdrop in an attempt to frame the debate covered in the rest of the book. He does this by addressing fundamental questions involving ecclesiology, missiology, and anthropology. Senter maintains that local churches have adopted a para-church character. He holds that this is in large part due to the *seeker-sensitive* and *purpose-driven* ministry strategies that are designed to evangelize adolescents.

Senter himself believes that current state of youth ministry is failing its present generation in evangelism and discipleship, and the current state of ecclesiology is failing youth ministry by not incorporating younger Christians into the work of the body.

Aim:

The goal of the text is to address these concerns in an intellectual dialogue, and defend them with scriptural principles and cultural relevance.

From here it attempts to develop a schema that places varying '*styles of youth work*' along two '*intersecting spectrums*'.

1. One relates to the degree to which young people are treated as the church *now* or as the church of the *future*.
2. The other focuses on churches that are either about *attraction* or *mission*, do they come to us or do we go to them?

Four youth ministry academics then outline their distinct philosophical and ecclesiological views regarding how youth ministry relates to the broader church. They are as follows:

Four Views: of youth ministry function and its relationship to the broader church:

(a) *Inclusive congregational:* (M. Nel: Professor -Youth ministry and Christian Education, South Africa)

Nel views the main problem as not with youth ministry, but with the church. Historically, the church and youth work have typically been autonomous and that this fragmentation of local congregations only weakens the overall discipleship process. Instead, the church should view adolescents as a part of the church *now*:

"So, what do we want to happen in our youth ministry? Honestly, as a church we have treated young people like foster care, not family. They've become problems to deal with, rather than flesh and blood to love. We keep thinking that they have to change to fit into our church family. Instead we should be adapting the family to include them, just like we did as children were born into our own families"

Nel challenges the church to see youth as the church of today gifted for *today's* service, and that lasting relationships must be built between teens and older generations. Nel calls for churches to design a comprehensive approach that *enmeshes youth in the larger congregation of believers*. Rather than a separate

²²⁶ M. Senter (ed) W. Black, C. Clark and M. Nel (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001).

body of disconnected believers, the church should thoroughly integrate adolescents, making them full partners in every aspect of congregational life.

(b) Preparatory: (W. Black: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary)

Youth ministry is more like an *apprenticeship program*, with the focus on preparing teens for “the work of ministry” both now and later. With youth disciples-in-training, and youth ministry a school of preparation for future participation in church life. Black defines youth ministry as “*everything a church does with, to, and for teenagers that builds them into becoming the church.*”

The aim is to intentionally separate youth from other segments of the congregation in order to leverage the developmental strengths of adolescents:

“Youth ministry is a laboratory in which disciples can grow in a culture guided by spiritual coaches...One purpose of a laboratory is to allow learners to fail in a safe context and discover specific skills in the process. A lab is a hands-on place where involvement is essential to learning”

(c) Missional: (C. Clark: Fuller Seminary)

This position has many similarities with the ‘Preparatory’ approach, it is an -‘*inside-out*’ strategy focused on equipping adolescents to be sent as missionaries to their peers and beyond. As such, it recognizes youth as a ‘people group’ to be reached rather than just an age group. Therefore, youth ministry does not necessarily nurture ‘church kids’ but is essentially evangelistic:

“...the church that ministers to young people must embrace the culture in which the adolescents live...The goal is not to simply focus on those who already are involved in a given church’s youth ministry program... We have become convinced that our programs, music and ethos of youth ministry are enough to reach the lost, uninterested and disenfranchised...Very few churches see youth ministry as their missional mandate...”

(d) Strategic: (M. Senter: ed. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School)

In a much more radical approach, Senter proposes youth ministry primarily as ‘*church planting*’, supported by, but disconnected from, the local church.

Focusing on the multifaceted nature of today’s youth ministries and the cultural complexity of today’s youth, Senter seeks to unify the body of Christ (young and old) through youth ministry church planting:

“The church must view youth ministry not so much as a means of turning out models of Christian living in order to perpetuate existing church ministries, but as the best opportunity to launch a vital Christian witness to shape the faith community for the next generation”

Senter calls youth ministers to leverage the leadership that they develop in their youth ministries to launch new churches. Can youth ministry become a church on its own, with the youth minister the pastor and the new church planted under the blessing of the mother-church:

“Youth pastors should become spiritual midwives and assist in birthing new churches. They would begin as age group specialists but would be chosen to work with a group of students from the time the young people entered high school until they reached their mid-20s. The primary objective would be to develop a team of spiritually mature young adults and plant a new church”

Three Further Approaches to Youth Ministry:

Three further methodological approaches to youth ministry are worth mentioning here. The first is the more commonly known *'funnel'* method, the second is the popular *'purpose driven'* youth ministry approach, and the third is a more recent model based around an *'incarnational evangelism'* approach to youth mission.

*** The *'funnel'* method:**

A popular strategy of approach to youth ministry, this particular strategy has established roots in product marketing, education, public sector business, and charity campaigning. Widely used in ministry throughout the last century the method became popularized most notably by Doug Fields in his book *'Purpose Driven Youth Ministry'*.

Tim Gough outlines the method this way: ²²⁷

The funnel method divides youth ministry programs based on 'who' they're trying to reach and 'why', and are arranged so that one leads to another progressively. The funnel collecting a wide amount of water at the top and narrowing focus toward the bottom (i.e. lots of unbelievers in – and some believers come out).

The top of the funnel aims to reach as many as possible. In youth program terms this would be a 'crowd' or 'community-based' event with no Gospel content or teaching. This progresses through one or more stages of deepening content and 'narrowing' reach (e.g. a smaller event with an evangelistic talk, or a school CU, or a movie and discussion night). Finally ending with events/groups aimed only at Christians with focus on discipleship and service (e.g. a small group study).

Pros:

- * Young people do make the journey, build relationships, repent & believe
- * It makes ministry measurable, clear, and easy to evaluate
- * It allows a wider spectrum of volunteers as they help where their gifts best fit
- * It ticks both mission and ministry boxes
- * It keeps things fresh and moving
- * It helps leaders think about purpose, vision, aims, and values

Cons:

- * It's easily dishonest- *"come to a party...but we're actually sneakily trying to get you into the system"*
- * It's calling people to a *program* rather than sending out a clear, transparent call from the first to follow Jesus
- * Its not how Jesus or the Early Church did it
- * It assumes all young people come to Christ in the same way
- * It tends to be too program heavy for spontaneous relationships – and overload out of school commitments.
- * It adds another degree of separation between the vision/ministry strategy of the youth ministry, and the vision/ministry strategy of the church
- * It has potential to develop in-group, out-group cliques

²²⁷ Tim Gough: Tim Gough Website: (tim.gough: Food for Youth Pastors, Workers and Volunteers) *'The Youth Ministry Funnel Method: The Joys and Beefs'*: <http://timgough.wordpress.com/2011/11/10/the-youth-ministry-funnel-method-the-joys-beefs/>

*** The ‘purpose driven’ discipleship approach:**

This is Doug Field’s adaptation for youth of Rick Warren’s - ‘*Purpose Driven Church*’ model, using Warren’s 5 major purposes of church.²²⁸ The purpose driven paradigm is built around the basic premise that the Great Commandment (Matt 22:37-40) and the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20) provide us with *five purposes for ministry* (i.e. evangelism, worship, fellowship, discipleship and ministry), and a purpose driven youth ministry will have programs and structures that necessarily reflect those purposes.²²⁹

Field aim is to outline the essential ingredients for building a healthy youth ministry that is - *purpose driven*, a youth ministry where the goal is not dependant on one person or to direct programs, but focussed on ‘*discipling*’ students.²³⁰

Field believes our youth need more than information and relationships, that youth ministries are filled with Bible-literate students who bear no fruit, with all the right ‘knowledge’ but making none of the right daily life choices:

*“What I neglected is what students needed the most: I didn’t focus on a strategy that would help our committed students develop the habits, or spiritual disciplines, necessary to grow on their own when they were no longer in the youth ministry. For many students at my church, our discipleship plan reinforced their commitment to-or dependency on-programs and people. We had created an educated dependence when we should have prepared students with habits necessary for spiritual independence.”*²³¹

What is therefore needed is a *program-based discipleship plan*. Field’s discipleship formula consists of 3 components:

1. Education (teaching/small groups etc.)
2. Formation of independent spiritual habits through the spiritual disciplines²³²
3. Relationships²³³

In building his thesis around the 5 fundamental purposes, Fields then underlines what he believes to be **nine** essential foundations for developing healthy youth ministry growth.

1. *Connecting with the **power** of God for passionate, committed leadership:*
Youth ministry needs spiritually healthy leaders in order for the ministry to be healthy
2. *Defining and communicating the **purpose** of your ministry:*
The need to define the purpose of any church and apply it to the youth ministry
Clear purpose statements attract followers
3. *Identifying the **potential** audience:*²³⁴

²²⁸ Doug Fields: Purpose Driven Youth Ministry: PWDM (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

²²⁹ PDWM: p.46. Note: Fields states that PDYM is ‘a’ model; but it is not presented as ‘the’ model p.18.

²³⁰ PDWM: p.18.

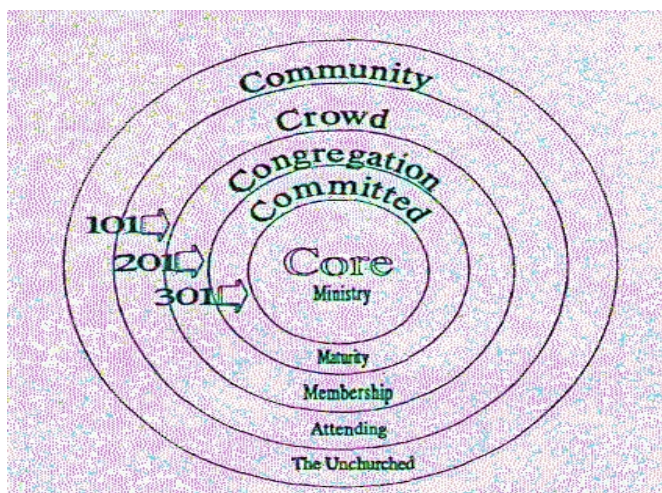
²³¹ PDYM: p.158.

²³² Saddleback defined 6 habits they wanted committed students to take with them: 1. Consistent time of prayer and Bible reading. 2. An accountable relationship with another Christian. 3. Commit to the body of Christ and church body (not just youth group) 4. Understand and participate in giving/tithing. 5. Memorize scripture; 6. Study the Bible on their own (beyond reading) p.160.

²³³ Field’s believes that one of the five characteristics of a healthy youth program is to put relationships first. Relationships are the key draw card for young adults and therefore need to take high priority, especially relationships with adults who “*make building relationships with students a high priority, and these relationships quicken the ministry’s effectiveness and enhance students’ spiritual maturity*”. This style of ministry becomes a ministry *with* students rather than a program-centred ministry *to* students. Programs are important but only after relationships have been developed. p.195, 235.

²³⁴ Saddleback designed a circular diagram to help identify the ‘potential audience’ range, from least committed to those most committed to the church, and therefore clarify which target audience they’re attempting to meet in any particular program. The 5 levels (circles) of commitment are: ‘*community, crowd, congregation, committed and core*. The ultimate goal is to move individual commitment from *community to core*. Within those circles Saddleback uses a ‘baseball diamond’ diagram used to help communicate the ‘sequencing’ of their programs and plan for spiritual growth. P.211.

Understanding your youth, both in the church and in the community
Targeting and testing their receptiveness to the purpose



4. **Creating programs** that fulfil the purpose and reach the designated audience:
Applying the '5 levels of commitment' to the 5 purposes outlining 5 characteristics of healthy youth programs
5. **Implementing processes** that move youth to maturity:
Attempting to outline a clear & measurable spiritual growth plan that students move through to maturity
6. **Clearly planned values**:
Outlining the beliefs of the youth group and having participants support the values
7. **Involvement of (parents) whole family**:
Outlining the importance of teaming up with families to ensure a strong and healthy youth ministry
8. Recruiting volunteers & developing **participating** leadership:
5 steps a youth leader needs to work on to recruit quality leaders
9. **Persevering through a changing landscape**: How to avoid burnout

*** The 'incarnational evangelism' approach:**

This particular approach is outlined in Pete Ward's - *'God at The Mall: Youth Ministry that Meets Kids Where They're At'*. The book explores the two different 'complementary disciplines' of youth ministry, asking the question whether youth ministry strategy should be based on the movement - 'inside-out' or 'outside-in'? ²³⁵

The 'inside-out' discipline is the familiar youth group method of- "*starting with the young people who are inside the church, the group reaches out to others to attract new members so that they might be introduced to Jesus*". ²³⁶

²³⁵ Pete Ward: *God at the Mall: Youth Ministry That Meets Kids Where They're At*: (Grand Rapids: Baker Academy, 1997). Also called the 'nucleus-fringe' model, Ward believes the weakness of the 'inside-out' approach is that it's limited by its starting point i.e. the narrow social connections of Christian youth to naturally connect with and reach beyond their natural friendship group or social/cultural/ethnic connections. It's strengths lie in its capacity to socialize people into the life of the church p.16-17.

²³⁶ *God at the Mall*: p.1.

By exploring theology-based theory and combining it with practical application, Ward aims to present a youth ministry approach based on incarnational, culturally sensitive outreach to the unchurched. The aim is to encourage youth leaders to gear their ministry focus towards reaching the youth of the community, meeting them where they're at, befriending them and introducing them to Christ.

The aim of Ward's approach is to reach beyond those young people who are within easy reach of existing church members to 'be with' those outside the life of the church as a means of sharing the gospel (i.e. the un-churched who may be socially or culturally distant from the existing church). Ward identifies this alternate, parallel approach as the '*outside-in*', or '*incarnational outreach*' discipline (or more commonly called the '*relational outreach*').²³⁷

With this approach, youth ministry steps beyond the church *into* the local community. This '*relational outreach*' approach typically draws on the doctrine of the incarnation of Christ as the central theological motif for youth ministry outreach. The youth worker follows the incarnation of Jesus as an example of how to minister: just as God became a human being *to build a relationship with human beings*, so we are called to *go* to young people, to meet them *where they're at*, to participate in the life of the un-churched and address their issues and concerns.²³⁸

Ward's '*relational evangelism*' approach follows five basic stages: *contact*, *extended contact*, *proclamation*, *nurture and church*. The ultimate aim is to begin to move young people who are well outside the social group of the existing church and see them established in their '*own church*', one where the gospel is *contextualized within their own culture*. Making '**contact**': "going to places where young people naturally hang out"; then '**extended contact**': "moving the relationship physically away from the initial point of contact", followed by '**proclamation**': movement to a new stage where the youth worker looks for an opportunity to proclaim the gospel message. (The importance of contact and extended contact as precursors to this stage is summed up in the imperative that youth workers - "*earn the right to speak*"). Once young people make a response to the gospel, the focus of the ministry moves to **nurture and church**.

The final outcome will often be a *new 'Youth Church'* where the gospel is "*contextualized amongst a group of people who were not previously part of the Church. The hope is that Jesus can become real within the subculture which these people share*".²³⁹

The whole focus of this youth ministry philosophy is to build relational inroads to the un-churched as an entry point to gospel relationships and gospel community. The primacy of relationships are at the heart of this model, therefore regular informal un-programmed social time with Christians who model the faith, is key to their ministry methodology.²⁴⁰

²³⁷ Ward uses the term 'incarnational' in a technical sense to denote the crossing of barriers to share the faith by being with a group of people and to describe the particular way those within the 'outside-in' group should minister p.19. Ward is also at pains to point out that these 2 categories in no way imply the traditional model is not incarnational in that it also seeks to follow the example of Jesus, or that one discipline is primarily evangelistic and the other primarily concerned with nurturing those already in the faith. Nor that one is solely concerned with church and the other with 'society'. Ward makes his distinction between the two based on 3 factors: 1.Where the work starts 2.The methodology adopted 3.Assumptions about culture and faith p.8, 19.

²³⁸ Mall: p.13, 19.

²³⁹ This new 'youth church' will be separate from the adult congregation but may be linked to a local church or denominational group but have some independence from it p.18, 74.

²⁴⁰ Mall: p.37. For a critique of this model read Graham Stanton's - '*Can Adult Church Leaders 'be all things' to Reach Gen Y?*' (Sydney Anglican Website: June 22nd 2008).

Perspectives on Family Ministry: 3 Views:

Timothy P. Jones (ed):²⁴¹

Thesis: Families must resume their role as the primary disciplers of children:

Jones belief is that the missing ingredient in the discipleship of children today is the family. The church has often operated as the primary means of spiritual development of youth and children, and therefore parents have gradually relinquished their role.²⁴²

The book adheres to the scriptural belief that parents (and especially fathers) should be the primary discipleship-makers of children, and that the church should therefore rethink and redevelop its 'family ministry' to support, encourage and foster that role.

Jones goes on to make the case that every church is called to some form of family ministry.²⁴³ That although there's no widespread agreement on what family ministry should look like — what's meant by true "family ministry" isn't simply one more program, but a fundamentally different way of doing church, it requires refocusing '*every church process*' to engage *parents* in the process of discipling their children.²⁴⁴

Jones defines 'family ministry' as the following:

*"The process of intentionally and persistently realigning a congregation's proclamation and practices so that parents are acknowledged, trained, and held accountable as the persons primarily responsible for the discipleship of their children."*²⁴⁵

Aim:

Jones argues that most children's/youth ministry models operate on the 'programmatic ministry model' where ministries are organized around separate 'silos' with little consistent intergenerational interaction. Family Ministry', when it exists is just one more program. Jones aims to help individuals and churches think through family ministry, firstly by presenting the historical contexts and foundations for family ministry and then outlining three of the most prominent models of family oriented models seeking to reverse this trend.²⁴⁶

All 3 models/philosophies/methodologies outlined share the same values but approach the process differently. Each claim to base their approach on scripture, all 3 aim to draw the home and the church into a life-transforming partnership.

The three approaches are identified as - *family integrated, family-based and family-equipping*:

(a) The Family integrated model:

²⁴¹ Timothy P. Jones: Perspectives on family Ministry: 3 Views: (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009).

²⁴² On page 16, Jones references a Nationwide Barna Study conducted in 2003 indicating parents had largely given over the responsibility for the spiritual nurture and development of their children to the church, a responsibility that was impossible for the church to achieve alone - "*Unfortunately no matter how hard the church tries, it's incapable of bringing a child to complete spiritual maturity: that is the job of the family. The more willing churches are to play the co-dependent role in this drama, the less likely we are to see spiritually healthy families and a generation of young people who grow into mature believers*" (Parents Accept Responsibility for their Child's Spiritual Development but Struggle with Effectiveness) <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/120-parents-accept-responsibility-for-their-childs-spiritual-development-but-struggle-with-effectiveness>

²⁴³ Perspectives: p.46.

²⁴⁴ Perspectives: p.41.

²⁴⁵ Perspectives: p.40.

²⁴⁶ All three philosophies would agree that - "*the primary training ground for discipleship and spiritual formation is the nuclear family rather than the local church.*" All three also agree on three basic assumptions: (1) God has called parents (and especially fathers) to take personal responsibility for the Christian formation of their children; (2) Scripture is the supreme and sufficient standard for how to do ministry; and (3) the generations need one another. However, each system maintains distinct perspectives on philosophical and methodological matters. Perspectives: p.46-47.

The family-integrated (or family-driven, family discipleship) model is the most radical and is distinguished by its insistence of 'integration' as an ecclesiological principle...it eliminates all age-segregated, peer-oriented ministry. Nearly all programs and events are '*multigenerational*' with the delivery method of discipleship primarily in and through the home, with parents the primary disciple-makers, and families seeking to evangelize other families through hospitality evangelism in the home.²⁴⁷

This model considers the purpose of the church is to equip parents (and primarily fathers) to evangelize and disciple their children and to equip families to evangelize other families: "*Our church has no youth ministers, children's ministers, or nursery. We do not divide families into component parts. We do not separate the mature women from the young teenage girls who need their guidance. We do not separate the toddler from his parents during worship. In fact, we don't even do it in Bible study. We see the church as a family of families*".²⁴⁸

(b) The family-based 'philosophy':

Here, the children's programmatic structure remains unchanged, but the key is a philosophical or 'focus' shift, where programs are refocused and events, as well as '*intergenerational curriculum*,' are utilized within the already existing structures. They are not activity based, nor uni-generational, but retain age-segregation for missional reasons.²⁴⁹

The expectation is that every ministry will intentionally include intergenerational, multigenerational and family-focused events, contact and mentoring, drawing families and generations together and actively encourage parents' engagement in the discipleship process.²⁵⁰

Their aim is to equip Christian parents to become primary disciplers and to *partner intentionally and dynamically* with families in the discipleship process.²⁵¹ "*We are not suggesting a radical change in programming. What we are suggesting is a fresh mindset—parents and family are crucial to faith development in every area of a ministry's program*".²⁵²

(c) The family equipping model:

This model is a hybrid, representing middle ground between the two. It operates on the belief that the path of spiritual formation is built on the foundation of strong families (with parents the primary disciple-makers) and strong faith communities working together i.e. *discipleship through partnership*.²⁵³ Each aspect of congregational life is reconstructed to consciously 'co-champion' the church's ministry and the parents' responsibility.²⁵⁴

Age-segregated ministries remain but their aim is to find ways to use those ministries to train, involve, and equip parents. A high premium is placed on *intergenerational* interaction: "*Family-equipping churches retain some age-organized ministries but restructure the congregation to partner*

²⁴⁷ Perspectives: p.42f.

²⁴⁸ Perspectives: p.55.

²⁴⁹ Family-based philosophy believes that age-organized programs function, not only to address cultural ills in relevant and practical ways, but more importantly, as a vital missiological tool to reach the hearts of those that might otherwise not hear the gospel. Family based churches recognize the evangelistic opportunity of the church extends beyond the doors of Christian homes p.107 & 114-116.

²⁵⁰ The belief here is that something is seriously wrong if all mentors of children and youth are only within the twenty-something age bracket. The belief is that the Bible couches discipleship in multigenerational terms (Titus 2:1-8), suggesting that a network of grandparents, empty nesters, young couples, college students, single parents and widowers provide the best context for discipleship outside an intact family unit p.109.

²⁵¹ Perspectives: p.43 & 106.

²⁵² Family-based ministries do not see themselves so much as a ministry 'model' but a philosophy of ministry. The two core values undergirding this philosophy being flexibility to operate across different church cultures, and focus balance on both church and unchurched family units p.98.

²⁵³ Perspectives: p.144.

²⁵⁴ Strother uses the term 'emerging generations' to describe the emphasis given to the restructure process. Indicating that children and youth are not only vital for the future church but also the present, and as such they should be called to responsibility and maturity as full participants in the community of faith p.144.

*with parents at every level of ministry so that parents are acknowledged, equipped, and held accountable for the discipleship of their children”.*²⁵⁵

Rather an additional ministry – this particular model is a philosophy of ministry that shapes the way every ministry within the church relates to families.

.....

²⁵⁵ The aim is twofold: 1. Engage and equip parents as the primary disciplers 2. Partner with parents to develop a definite plan for their children's Christian formation. p.145.

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YOUTH & CHILDREN'S MINISTRY - FIELD QUESTIONNAIRE -

* Note: the language references were modified for separate youth and children's documents.

Basic Data:

Name:

Church:

Role:

Length of time in role:

F/T or P/T capacity:

What prior training have you had for the role:

Number of years experience in youth ministry:

Number of assisting staff: volunteers:

How long has the youth ministry been running at the church:

How many youth in the *entire* program:(i.e. church, group time, other)

Junior High: (Please indicate if your junior youth numbers start at yr 6)

Senior High:

How does this compare to 5yrs previous: remained static: increased by %: declined by %:

Percentage of youth in *non-Sunday* activities from churched or unchurched families:

(Please indicate if your junior youth numbers start at yr 6)

Junior High: % churched % unchurched

Senior High: % churched % unchurched

What percentage of youth participating only *on Sundays* are:

(Please indicate if your junior youth numbers start at yr. 6)

Junior High: % churched % unchurched

Senior High: % churched % unchurched

How long does the youth group meet for each week:

List the key activities that take up the main meeting time & the typical time percentage given to each activity:

Ministry Methodology:

Role & Philosophy:

1. Describe the main *functions* of your *role* in relation to the youth ministry:

2. Describe the *key functions* of those who may *assist* you in the ministry:

3. What is your particular *philosophy* or *model* of youth ministry?
(E.g. what takes core focal priority- discipling/mission/outreach/community life/other? etc.)

4. Are there any differences between how *you* perceive your role/function/ philosophy of youth ministry and that of:
 - a. The Minister:

 - b. The congregation:

5. What are the core *Biblical principles* (if any) that drive your particular philosophy of youth ministry?

6. What *core strategies* are in place to implement that philosophy?

7. How does your philosophy of youth ministry fit with:
 - a. The philosophy of *children's ministry* in your church?

 - b. The philosophy of *young adults* and *family* ministry of the church?

8. What key *texts/people* have most influenced or shaped your particular philosophy of youth ministry?

Vision and Implementation:

9. Was the ministry you came into a '*start-up*' or *pre-established* one?
 - a. If a '**start-up**': what specific strategies were implemented to *begin* the ministry?

 - b. What specific strategies were implemented to then *consolidate* the ministry?

 - c. If a '**pre-established**' ministry: what *strategy changes* have you made (if any)?

 - d. Why were those changes made?

10. Who sets the *vision* of the youth ministry? And...
 - a. How does that vision relate to the *children's ministry* vision at the church?

 - b. How does that vision relate to the *overall vision* strategy of the church?

11. List of *core structures* of the ministry? (i.e. group time? church? holiday? camps? scripture? other?)

12. How does the church envision the youth ministry's *function* in relation to *parents and families*?
 - a. In regard to believers:

 - b. In regard to unbelievers:

13. What particular strategies are in place to engage or attract *unchurched youth* to the ministry?

14. How does the church see its relationship/role to *local schools*?

15. What *percentage flow on* (if any) do you see from:

- a. Scripture in schools to Youth group?
- b. Scripture in schools to church?
- c. Youth group to church?
- d. Parents of youth to church?
- e. Other?

Intergenerationality, Growth and Transitions:

16. Is the ministry developed around an *age/stage-based* structure or with an *intergenerational mix*?

17. Is there any focus on developing or fostering '*inter-generationality*' in the way the youth ministry is executed?

a. If so, what *age breadth*?

b. *How* is it done?

18. Are there any specific mechanisms in place to measure *spiritual growth or understanding*?

If so, what?

19. Are there any '*transition*' mechanisms in place for moving participants from youth to adult programs?

a. On average, how many participants make *successful* transition from youth to adult program?

b. What *follow-up* (if any) is given to youth who *fail* to transition?

Leadership Selection, Recruiting and Training:

20. How are leaders/volunteers *recruited*?

a. By *whom*?

b. What are the selection criteria?

21. What *training, coaching or mentoring* is offered to lay leaders?

22. What does the training *encompass*?

Education and Communication:

23. What (if any) *input/education/communication* given to the *parents* of youth:

a. In regard to the youth program and methodology

b. In regard to youth issues/parenting

c. Other?

24. What (if any) *input/education/communication* regarding the vision of the youth ministry is given to the *broader church community*:

Support and Resourcing:

25. What action do you take to keep yourself supported, refreshed and current in the area of youth ministry? (E.g. Youth networks/peer groups/contact with Youthworks/other?)

26. What *support* is given to the youth ministry staff & leadership *from the church*?

27. Are any other members of the *staff ministry team* involved in any aspect of the ministry?

If so, in what capacity?

28. What *resourcing* is given to the ministry?

Feedback and Challenges:

29. What (if any) *evaluation* or *feedback* mechanisms are in place?

a. In regard to the program:

b. In regard to your leadership:

c. In regard to volunteers:

30. In your opinion, what are the particular *challenges* facing:

a. Youth ministry today:

b. Youth ministers:

Other:

31. Any other thoughts/comments?

- THANKS -

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