

YOUTH VISIONING TEAM

REPORT TO ST. LUKE'S CHURCH COUNCIL: June 2014

OVERVIEW

Upon the recommendation of the ministry staff, St. Luke's Church Council established a team to explore how to develop a sustainable youth ministry culture for St Luke's.

The team was selected by the Faith Formation Committee after prayerful discernment over nominations garnered from an intergenerational forum held in November 2013 to discuss the future of youth ministry at St. Luke's. The team consisted of Jeff Heffernan (chair), Chris Christensen, Cathy Crawford, Sarah Elliott, Andy Heffernan, Katherine Mousel, Brendan Rice, Alex Ross, Matt Sansoterra, Jenny Ward, and Sharon Ross (as staff member).

The team met nine times between January 2014 and May 2014 to discuss the book ***Sustainable Youth Ministry*** by Mark DeVries, a youth ministry director, author, speaker, and consultant. He is the founder of Youth Ministry Architects, a coaching service that allowed him to develop and test the ideas in his book.

Each meeting began with times of shared food, fellowship, and caring conversations. The meetings were as much a spiritual process as an intellectual one and consisted of devotions, *lectio divina*, prayer, discernment, deliberation about each chapter's content, sharing where we currently saw our youth ministry, and prioritizing concepts and ideas. The Youth Visioning Team sponsored an open intergenerational forum in March 2014 to educate the congregation as well as brainstorm possible strategies to build a sustainable youth ministry at St. Luke's. The data collected from this forum confirmed that the direction of the team's thought process reflected the experiences and needs of the congregation.

We found that as one of the first truly balanced intergenerational teams we were modeling what we hope to see happen throughout the entire St. Luke's culture.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

As we reviewed the main concepts of the book, we discovered the recurrence of key themes such as: a superstar orientation of youth ministry is intrinsically flawed; a well-developed structure of support, accountability, and training for youth workers is needed; the whole church should "own" youth ministry; and how important relationships are at all levels.

We affirmed that our youth are integrated in such areas as worship and service.

We determined our growing edges are in the areas of structure, attention to numbers of disconnected youth, and recognition that youth ministry belongs to the whole church.

These key concepts are addressed in our Youth Ministry Philosophies found on pages 7-8).

We have also provided a brief synopsis of each chapter of the book, what we believed were the salient points that applied to our task. You will find our summaries for the book on pages 3-6.

We have included the implementation steps for the first year which include the establishment of Middle School and High School Planning Teams who, in conjunction with the Faith Formation Director and pastors, will be charged with designing plans for the youth ministry under their purview. (See "Goals for Youth Ministry 2014-2015" on page 9)

Lastly, a diagram of the structure we recommend for St. Luke's can be found on page 10 along with a written explanation of its key elements on page 11.

AFFIRMING ST. LUKE'S STRENGTHS

The concept of a sustainable youth ministry as a partnership between home and congregation was introduced at St. Luke's a few years ago with the "*Child in Our Hands*" program and expanded later in a document entitled "*Youth Ministry Plan: New Life in Christ.*" The team's task was to build on this foundation and discover through interaction with the youth and other members of the congregation a series of next steps. We began this task with an open intergenerational forum naming differences between church youth groups and non-faith based groups, where we saw God working in our midst and naming aspects of our current youth ministry that carried frustrations.

Distinguishing characteristics of a healthy church youth group:

-  Meetings tied into our belief system
-  Prayer
-  Safe place to share
-  God focused activities (including service)
-  Relationship building
-  Fun

Some things we celebrate:

-  Youth are integrated in many areas such as worship and service opportunities
-  Youth Sunday
-  Forums that include youth as well as adults
-  F.UN Sundays

The following frustrations and concerns also were expressed:

- ✚ Poor Communication
- ✚ Low participation
- ✚ Need for youth input
- ✚ Youth group “cursed” (too much transition with leaders; a desire for stability)
- ✚ Need for better structure and organization
- ✚ Parental support and encouragement lacking
- ✚ Kids come from many different school districts
- ✚ Youth are busy with many activities and responsibilities
- ✚ Not enough “fun”

SUMMARY OF BOOK’S CONTENT

Below are the salient points we took away from the book, chapter by chapter. We share our comments and important quotes from the book, as well as our observations as to their relevancy to St. Luke’s, so that you can get a feel for the book’s focus and its influence on our recommendations.

Introduction:

- ✚ “Don’t hurry. Don’t settle” (p14). We recognize there is a heightened concern about our youth ministry at St. Luke’s due to our history and the recent resignation of our last youth director. We must stay the course and not bow to external pressure to “fix” our youth ministry quickly.
- ✚ Exceptional youth ministries do not depend on “short –term, superstar staff” (p 14). We are willing to put in the work to create and implement a model that offers continuity of care and stability for our youth that does not depend on one individual.
- ✚ We have some good foundations and past experiences we can learn from (Logos, Child in our Hands, times when we had more youth participation across the board, and times when planning teams were in place).

Chapter 1 – Cracking the Code: The Anatomy of Stuckness in Youth Ministry

- ✚ Structures must be in place in order for great ideas to be implemented (p. 22).
- ✚ “Sustainable youth ministries thrive in a culture of experimentation, innovation and creativity”(p.23). Our focus at St. Luke’s must be to learn from the past, but not allow nostalgia to cripple us. We are aware that we must be willing to try new things and commit to evaluating their effectiveness.
- ✚ We are not unique in the facts that our kids come from many different schools and our families have packed schedules. These challenges are reality and are not to be used as excuses for a less-than-effective youth ministry.

- ✚ Some numbers matter. It is important to determine how many students are “ours,” the ratio of adults to youth, how many students we want to have active, and how many inactive youth we have connected with on a regular basis.
- ✚ “Youth ministry is about relationships” (p. 27).

Chapter 2 – The Easy Button: The Crisis of Chronic Underinvestment

- ✚ “The difference between an effective and an ineffective youth ministry is often directly tied to the level of investment a church makes” (p. 31).
- ✚ Fancy buildings with state of the art “stuff for youth” don’t build thriving youth ministries; appropriate staffing, clear vision, and structure do (p. 34).

Chapter 3 – Hoping, Wishing, and Praying: Beyond the Frantic Search for the Youth Ministry Superstar

- ✚ “The superstar orientation... keeps youth ministries stuck” (p.40). The high turnover rate of youth directors at St. Luke’s may in part be due to unrealistic expectations we have of young youth workers. Young youth workers are still learning how to organize, inspire, and focus. They may have lacked adequate support from others including such things as training, accountability, and aid in setting realistic and attainable goals.
- ✚ “The superstar syndrome always creates larger problems, not the least of which is removing the family, the elders, the deacons and other concerned adults from the lives of teenagers and replacing them with a new “youth ghetto” in which the rest of the church simply lets the youth minister take care of the kids” (p. 50). Our youth ministry model, in order to be sustainable, must include a broad base of congregational investment and involvement.

Chapter 4 – The Dance Floor: A Systems Approach to Youth Ministry

- ✚ The following quote captures our understanding of the essence of our goal and mission as a team : “Sustainable youth ministries take the leap from a short-term, patchwork ministry to ones based on established systems that last long after the current leadership team has moved on” (p.53).
- ✚ Two absolutely key components of this approach: a) Architecture – the structures of sustainability and b) Atmosphere – the culture, climate and ethos that sustain the health of an organization.
- ✚ We must be prepared for the challenges and the “mess” that is involved in building a sustainable youth ministry.

Chapter 5 – Building Right: The Structures of Sustainability

- ✚ Five key documents needed to build a solid foundation are: directories, annual events calendar, job descriptions, master recruiting list, and a curriculum template
- ✚ Four key visioning documents: a mission statement, measureable three-year goals, statement of values, an organizational chart.

Chapter 6 – Changing Culture: The Work of the Environmental Architect

- ✚ “The “hard structures” of youth ministry (control documents, visioning documents, and establishing processes) will produce little lasting change...if those efforts are not combined with at least equal attention to the “soft” attitudes – cultures and values (the atmosphere) – that lie beneath those structures.” We discussed how to do the “culture work” and the desire to keep the work we are doing from “just” landing in a file as opposed to a dynamic catalyst for change (p.75).
- ✚ The five decisions that most profoundly affect the building of a healthy climate: delivering results, trusting the process, importing joy into the chaos, embracing stories and metaphors, and instilling rituals and traditions.

Chapter 7 – Searching Right: A Primer for Youth Ministry Search Teams (*The chapter we found most helpful*)

- ✚ We resonated deeply with, and had an extended discussion based on, the following question posed by the author: “What would happen if we didn’t change our youth ministry model or vision or structure each time there was a staff change?” (p. 93). The results of this discussion directly impact the model we propose and recommend for St. Luke’s.
- ✚ Three essential roles for youth ministry are important: (96-98)
 1. *The craftsman* – the hands-on- person. “It is typically an inexperienced, enthusiastic young adult who has the ability to build relationships and develop creative programming. This is not someone tasked with seeing or being responsible for the big picture; in fact such expectations are the most common structural reason for youth ministries not getting off the ground.”
 2. *The general contractor* – someone who can supervise the work and make sure that all the right steps are being completed according to the design. “...typically (an individual) high on organizational skills and does a good deal of work behind the scenes to make sure that events and programs run efficiently.”
 3. *The architect in the trailer* – someone available to troubleshoot strategic challenges that inevitably arise.
- ✚ We need to define what “success” is for our youth worker(s).
- ✚ We wrestled with the following questions that ultimately led to our recommendations to develop an intentional intern training program:

“What would happen if our church felt called to cultivate and not just find superstars? “What would happen if (we) spent time creating an intentional process that would maximize the possibility that their current, young, inexperienced staff would, one day, become the kind of superstar (not just in youth ministry, but in their homes and their personal lives as well) every church seems to be looking for. What would happen if (we) saw the cultivation of this kind of superstar **central** to (our) calling? (p 106).

Chapters 8 and 9 addressed specific tools to support, grow, and hold youth workers accountable.

Chapter 10 – Architecting the Constellation: From Camp Counselor to Sustainable Leader

- ✚ This chapter stimulated discussions concerning the need for adequately training and continuing to support adult servants who work with youth, recruitment suggestions, and discussions about healthy adult/student ratios (the book recommends one adult for every five youth).

Chapter 11 – The Magnet Effect: Making Friendships Contagious

- ✚ We discussed the importance of building a friendship culture and how to go about doing that at St. Luke's. We talked about what a first time visitor would experience, and the importance of changing from a program focus to a friendship focus. "With a program focus, the number-one priority is getting our programs right. With a friendship focus, we corral our program preparation time so that, if something has to slide, it won't be our availability to the lost or lonely student walking through the door" (p. 164).
- ✚ Our students are much more likely to be moved relationally than programmatically. We considered the importance of hospitality from and by peers and the need to cultivate in our youth that awareness to take responsibility for creating a friendship culture at St. Luke's.

Chapter 12 - Offers advice to youth work in best practices for navigating church politics

Chapter 13 – Rabbit Trails and Brick Walls: When all the Brilliant Plans Don't Work

- ✚ Sustainable youth ministries sustain a process, not all strategic plans "work."
- ✚ The following table describes key differences between our work to develop a sustainable youth ministry and the more traditional approach to youth ministry (p. 195):

Sustainable Approach	Traditional Approach
Long-term focus on a single issue	Episodic focus with key issue buried beneath multiple issues in disconnected meetings
Responsibility shared by a team	Responsibility carried by the youth worker
Regular meetings	Concerns raised reactively and urgently at random meetings
Regular time set aside for strategic planning	Issue addressed between the urgent demands of the ministry
The expectation of a multiyear building process	The expectation of the quick fix
Working a plan	Reacting to anxiousness

APPLYING THE MAIN CONCEPTS

Reviewing the main concepts of **Sustainable Youth Ministry** in conjunction with reviewing **The New Life in Christ** youth ministry document crafted by St. Luke's approximately ten years ago, led to the crafting of the youth ministry philosophies listed below.

Youth Ministry Philosophies

A. Christ Centered:

"He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything." Colossians 1:18)

"All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, and for training in righteousness so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work." 2 Tim. 3:16-17

Jesus Christ is the focal point of all activities and relationships. Prayer and devotional study of God's Word are key components of faith formation. Therefore, these spiritual practices will undergird every facet of youth ministry and be encouraged in our youth through a variety of active learning opportunities.

B. Youth ministry belongs to the whole church:

"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ." 1 Corinthians 12:12

The whole church and the pastoral staff must pray for, encourage, support and be actively involved with the youth and those who minister to and with them.

C. Servants and Leaders:

"But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves." James 1:22

Those who serve with and lead youth reflect Christ and the church; their character and life-style should inspire spiritual growth and equip young people for service. Every effort must be made by the pastoral team, parents, and congregation to equip, support, and assist them.

D. Mentoring:

"I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure lives in you. For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands." 1 Timothy 1: 5-6

Strong relationships with adults are important for youth faith formation, and measures must be taken to invite and connect all youth with caring adults.

E. Service and Leadership:

“Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.” 1 Timothy 4: 12

We affirm that our youth are agents of mission; not primarily objects of mission. Youth are called to serve others and share their faith in their homes, schools, congregation, community, and the world.

F. Team Approach to Planning–

“For as in one body we have many members, and not all members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.” Romans 12: 4-5

Youth, parents, teachers, interns, pastors, faith formation director, and others must be involved in the planning and implementation of youth ministry events and activities.

G. Planning/Impact Events

“Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.” Romans 12:13

We are committed to investing time in developing both long term and short term goals that include providing a variety of opportunities such as: impact events, service opportunities, Bible study, and fellowship.

H. Friendship Culture

“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” John 17: 20-23

Students are much more likely to be moved relationally than by good programming, cool curriculum, and high tech events. Youth need intentional mentoring from godly servants to help them build a friendship culture.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS

Goals for Youth Ministry 2014-2015

1. **Establish middle school and high school planning teams by August 2014.** These teams will include the following: the faith formation director, pastor(s), intern(s) parents, youth, teachers, and servants from the congregation.

Team responsibilities

The planning teams will:

- plan, promote and evaluate middle school and high school events, activities, and curriculum,
 - work to intentionally broaden youth participation in all areas of church ministry,
 - create and implement a plan, in conjunction with faith formation committee, for drawing in youth who are not connected that includes goals and strategies for continued care,
 - ensure that each event and activity has an adult and youth point person to serve as champions who will actively promote youth related events and opportunities.
2. **Recruit and train a female intern by January 2015 as well as a male intern by August 2015.** The faith formation director in conjunction with the faith formation team will recruit interns, develop an intern training program and create a measurement tool for intern evaluation.
 3. **The faith formation team in conjunction with the associate pastor will ensure that all students in the 8th – 12th grades who do not have mentors are invited into the mentoring process by July 2014.** The pastor will meet with the parents and children of those who would like mentors to assist them in finding and matching them up with a mentor.
 4. **The faith formation director in conjunction with the faith formation committee will develop and implement a training program for teachers and adult servants from the congregation who serve and work with youth.**
 5. **The St. Luke's Youth Ministry Philosophies will be posted in key areas of the church,** including, but not limited to, the middle school through high school classrooms.

St. Luke's Youth Visioning Plan



- * Interns are here for two years. Their first year they will be mentored by the second year intern.
- * In the near future we would hope to have a Youth Director that will help in all areas involving youth.

EXPLANATION: THE ST LUKE'S YOUTH VISIONING DIAGRAM

This diagram represents a holistic view of our congregation's youth ministry. Note that the youth are the center and are surrounded by a circle representing their care and nurture. The entire church ministry staff as well as the congregation is responsible for the faith formation of our youth. Planning team members for middle school and high school events, activities, and curriculum include classroom teachers and pastors in addition to youth, parents, adult servants, the faith formation director, and interns.¹ The planning teams serve in the role of "general contractor" (refer to the notes from the book's Chapter 7 on page 5 of this report). Interns will be here for two years and be staggered as to gender. The first year intern will be mentored by the second year intern. As our program grows, consideration will be given to hiring a youth director who would then report to the faith formation direction and be responsible for coordinating the planning teams, work with the interns, and promote youth participation in all areas of congregational life.

¹ See summary on page 5 regarding the roles of craftsperson, the general contractor, and the architect. For our purposes the interns are the craftspersons; the general contractor role is filled by the planning teams; the architect roles are filled by the faith formation director and faith formation committee in conjunction with the planning teams.