

Contents

Introduction	11
Building Christian Community	15
1. How do I establish one-on-one relationships with youth?	16
2. How do we make youth ministry personal in a large church?	17
3. How do we keep youth from falling through the cracks?	17
4. How do we engage those who do not want to be in the group but have to be there?	18
5. What about youth with special needs? We have a boy who is deaf and a foreign exchange student who needs our youth to speak more slowly so that she can keep up with the conversation.	19
6. How do we help new youth feel at home?	20
7. How do we handle cliques?	20
8. How do we mesh kids from different school districts when the only time they see one another is at church? If even a large minority of the group comes from one school, they dominate the group because they know one another.	21
9. All our youth go to the same school and seem unwilling to be open and vulnerable with one another. What do we do?	22
10. How do we help those who are excluded by the group?	23
11. How do we teach youth to have respect for one another and for adults who do not agree with them?	24

Dealing With Discipline	27
12. How do we begin to establish community rules?	27
13. What are some guidelines for enforcing a covenant of conduct? How do we handle a youth who will not honor the commitments made to the group?	28
14. At what point do we turn on the tough love?	28
15. How do we deal with youth who provoke the question, Why are you here?	29
16. What do we say to youth who stay away because other youth are so disruptive?	29
17. How do we reach youth who are more focused on entertaining their peers than on what is happening in the class/fellowship group?	30
18. How do we maintain a semblance of order without yelling, threatening, or punishing?	30
19. How do we get their attention to start the meeting?	31
Topics/Resources	33
20. Where do we find new approaches and/or ideas for topics/resources?	33
21. What makes a resource good?	35
22. How do we choose resources that meet the needs of everyone?	35
23. How in-depth should we go in Bible study with youth?	36
24. What topics should we avoid in dealing with youth?	37
25. Topics about sexuality are often ignored by the church. How can we carefully and responsibly deal with them?	37
Questions You Didn't Ask	
26. What should I look for as I evaluate resources?	38

Long-Range Planning and Youth Ownership	41
27. How do we plan long-range?	41
28. How do we work out a plan but still give youth ownership and get them involved?	43
29. How much planning is too much to give over to youth themselves?	44
30. How can youth be encouraged to plan their own ministries?	44
31. We need help in planning for long-range projects, specifically setting priorities (Why do youth want to go?) and planning and logistics (What do we do about fundraising, making arrangements for the trip, and so forth?).	45
Getting Youth More Involved	49
32. How do we get youth to attend consistently?	49
33. How do we draw into the faith those youth who are on the outside/fringe of the group? Some of them come regularly but do not seem to be touched by what we do.....	49
34. We have good attendance at social events, but it is like pulling teeth to get youth involved with mission projects and fundraisers. Help!	50
35. How do we deal with the fact that youth have such incredibly busy schedules and we want them to commit even more time and energy?	51
36. I attend a commuter church. How do we get community youth involved in the church? What is a good start?	52
37. How do we keep more-mature junior highs interested in coming back when less-mature youth dominate the group?	53
38. What are some ways to focus seventh and eighth graders on serious issues?	53

- 39.** How do we hold the attention of seventh and eighth graders for an hour's worth of serious material? 54
- 40.** We live in a small town and have only a few youth. With so few, it is hard to do some things. What can we do? 54
- 41.** We live in a small town where most of the youth go to another church. Our few youth get discouraged because the other church's programming looks so exciting. What can we do? 55

Questions You Didn't Ask

- 42.** How do we work with age-level differences? 55

Balancing Spiritual

Growth, Learning, and Fun 57

- 43.** What does spiritual growth mean? 57
- 44.** The youth of our church are suspicious of anything labeled as Christian because they associate Christianity with the fundamentalism pervasive in the larger culture. They believe they know all about Christianity, when they actually know little. How can we share with them an authentic Christianity and not run them off? 59
- 45.** Where do we draw the line between wanting youth to enjoy coming to church and pushing them to grow beyond fellowship? 60
- 46.** How do we strike a good balance between spiritual growth, learning, and fun? 61
- 47.** How do we inspire youth to want to learn about God when they have "more interesting" things on their minds? 61
- 48.** How do we help youth grow spiritually when so many other activities take up their time? 62
- 49.** How do we have an effective devotional time without losing their interest? 62
- 50.** How do we teach prayer to this age group? 62

Questions You Didn't Ask

- 51. What is all this about faith maturity?
Should we be concerned about it?
How do we make it happen? 63

What Makes a Good Counselor? 65

- 52. What are the most important attributes
of a good counselor? 65
- 53. How do I stay in touch with the
problems youth are having? 66
- 54. How do I keep from being intimidated
by youth? 67
- 55. How do I get on the youth level
to improve communication? 68
- 56. How do I avoid getting discouraged? 69
- 57. What about long-term burnout? 71
- 58. How do we answer questions youth ask about
our pasts, when we made the same, or worse,
mistakes as the ones we see them making? How
can we help them really know us without making
ourselves seem like bad models? 72
- 59. How do I keep youth active when I am burned
out and do not feel like being active myself? 73
- 60. How do we help volunteers come out of
their safety zones and try new things? 74
- 61. How do we help volunteers be less judgmental?
They feel overwhelmed and respond by being critical. 74
- 62. How can fellowship leaders know what is
happening in Sunday school (so that we
do not duplicate)? 75
- 63. How do we know when to tell a parent
something that a youth has confided in us? 76

**Recruiting and
Training Volunteers 77**

- 64. How do we recruit volunteers? 77
- 65. What are some different ways to recruit
and train volunteers? 79

- 66.** How do we find and train leaders youth will accept? 80
- 67.** How do we keep leaders? After a year, they say, "I've had my turn." 81
- 68.** How do we get volunteers to make serious commitments long-term? 82
- 69.** What about models for training? What should volunteers know? 82

Involving Parents in Youth Ministry 85

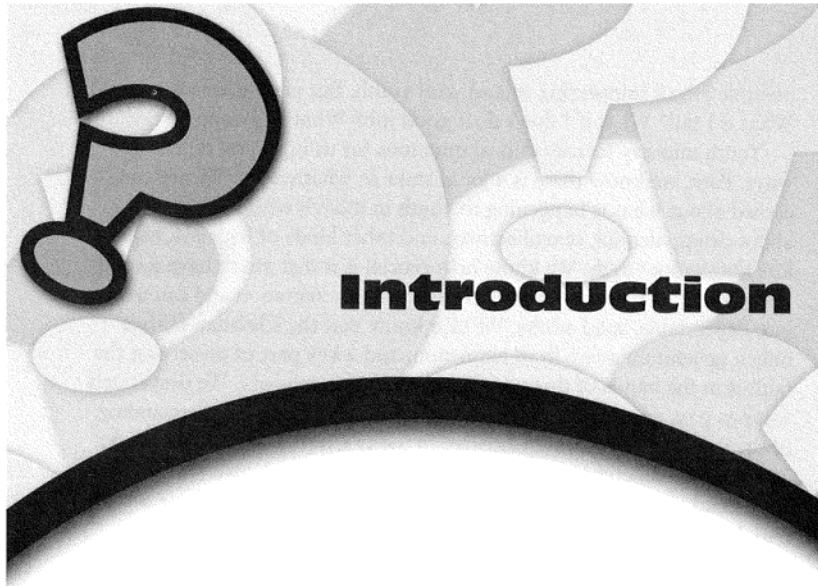
- 70.** Why do we want to get parents more involved? 85
- 71.** One of our major problems is getting parents involved. We have to ask for help from the faithful few who support us all the time. What can we do to stimulate increased involvement from parents? 86
- 72.** How do we help youth develop an appropriate value system if their parents do not reinforce it? 87
- 73.** What are some ways we can be supportive of parents and minister to them? 88
- 74.** What is an appropriate intervention in what we judge to be a threatening home situation? 88
- 75.** How do we deal with difficult parents? 89
- 76.** My first parents' meeting is coming up. What do I say to them? 90

Getting Support From the Congregation 91

- 77.** How do we help the congregation realize and act on their responsibilities for youth? 91
- 78.** How do we get adults in the church to realize that youth are important enough to spend time with? 91
- 79.** What church structures are necessary to support youth ministries? 92

80. How do we raise awareness among other church staff about the importance of youth ministry?	93
81. What can you, as a layperson, do if you think the church is making poor decisions relative to youth, but you are not on the right committee?.	94
82. How do we help youth feel significant to others in the congregation—that is, how do we help adults (besides family or close friends) know youth by name and take an interest in them?	95
Sunday School Is Sooo Boring!	97
83. How do we know when youth are bored? Are they by nature bored with church, and what can we do to change this?	98
84. How do we get youth to attend Sunday school regularly?.	99
85. How can we find out what youth are interested in learning in Sunday school, other than asking them directly?	100
86. What are good Sunday school resources? I want something that will engage the interest of youth but will not take much preparation time.	101
87. What is the secret for getting youth to be quiet and pay attention without making it like school?	102
88. Why do youth complain that Sunday school is too much like school?	103
89. What resources are available for youth Sunday school that will help a layperson feel prepared to answer all those questions we hope the youth will feel comfortable enough to ask?	104
90. How do we encourage youth to learn to make their own moral decisions and not just mouth the standards of others?	104

91. Is there any topic that should be avoided with tenth through twelfth graders in Sunday school?	106
Questions You Didn't Ask	
92. How do I develop some kind of comprehensive plan for youth Sunday school?	106
93. If we have a comprehensive plan, what do we do about important topical issues?	107
94. What about differences in the ways youth learn? Is that important for Sunday school?	108
Old Stuff and New Stuff	109
95. The old paradigm for fellowship groups seems out of step. What is the next generation?	109
96. How important is it that we know what the Millennial Generation is?	110
97. What About Safe Sanctuaries?	112
98. What are gifts and graces for youth ministry?	113
99. I feel driven to work with youth. Is that a call to ministry?	114
For Professionals Only	115
100. How do I know when it is time to leave?	115
101. How do I leave with the least amount of damage?	116
102. How do I work in an environment in which I do not feel the senior pastor's support?	117
103. I have been invited by another church to consider taking their youth ministry position. How do I know if this is a good situation?	117
Youth Ministry Websites	119
For Further Reading	121



Why 103 questions? Hey, because anyone can do 100 questions. We wanted something more.

That something more is based on questions that have actually been asked by youth workers in workshops and seminars that I have led around the country. At the beginning of workshops, I distributed three-by-five index cards and asked the participants to write down the questions and concerns they had. The rule was one question to a card. (Index cards are cheap, and that way I could sort them out easily.) After several years of doing workshops, I had a large stack of index cards, each with its question. That stack of cards was the starting point for this book. Some questions in the book were not asked in those workshops. Some of them came from staff members at the General Board of Discipleship. Others, which are listed as “Questions You Didn’t Ask,” are foundational issues that should be addressed by all of us at some point in our ministries with youth. But the heart of the book is the list of questions that youth workers asked.

The questions were cries for help. People genuinely wanted to know how to and why to do many different things in youth ministry. This may have been the most important impression I carried away from all those workshops. People genuinely care about youth and want to do the best

11

possible job of ministering to and with youth. But people are also scared: What if I fail? What if I don't do a good job? What will happen?

Youth ministry focuses critical questions for us in several different ways. First, we know there is a lot at stake in what we do. We are concerned about what is happening to youth in today's world. We know about drugs, alcohol, sexual activity, and other kinds of high-risk behaviors that tempt youth. We know how crucial it is that youth have a solid background so that they can stand firm against temptation and can mature into dependable, solid adults. We also know that the Christian faith is only a generation away from extinction, and a key part of preserving the faith is in the hands of those of us who do youth ministry. We desperately want to pass onto youth the teachings of the faith and an understanding of the importance of being Christian in today's world. Since there is a lot at stake, we sometimes care so much that we get in our own way.

Second, youth ministry is incarnational. Who we are and how we act may be even more important than what we teach. We do not want to turn youth off from the faith because who we are screams so loudly they cannot hear what we say. So, we want to be sure we do things right. Beyond the immediate fears of messing up, there is also a strong theological component to incarnational ministry. After all, the heart of Christian faith is that, as St. Irenaeus said, "[God] became what we are so that we could become what [God] is" (my translation; from "Irenaeus Against Heresies," Book V, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325, Volume I*, page 526; William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., reprint 1973). Two thousand years after the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, we cannot see God with our own eyes. But we know that one of the places where youth see God is in the lives of adults around them. The more important the adult is in their lives, the more important it is that they see God in that adult. For many youth, the important adults in their lives are those of us who work with them in youth ministry. No wonder we are scared of making a big mistake. A lot is at stake.

Third, most of us feel that we are ill-equipped and inadequate for the ministry that we try to carry out. Take me as an example. I began doing youth ministry in the local church more than forty years ago. I have been a leader in youth ministry on the district, conference, and jurisdictional levels and have directed church camps for years. Then I went to Nashville and served on the youth ministry staff of the General Board of Discipleship, where I developed youth curriculum resources, helped plan national events, and led training workshops all over the country. Most

recently, in semi-retirement, I am again working in youth ministry, as a volunteer in the local church. I ought to be equipped for ministry, right? And yet, each Sunday I am aware of how much more I need to know in order to be effective with youth. Each of us continues to learn and grow in who we are and what we do.

So, for all of us, this book is about how to do youth ministry. You will not find much here in the way of theology or Bible, although I believe that theology and biblical knowledge is critical for youth ministry. That is the topic of another book. This book is basic how-tos, with some why-tos thrown in.

This book is the result of more than forty years of doing youth ministry and more than fifteen years training youth ministers. Most of what I know about youth ministry I have learned from them. My thanks go to all those youth ministers with whom I have talked over the years and miles. I am grateful for the questions they have raised that ultimately became this book. My friends in youth ministry have pushed me to think more about our common ministry and to search for answers to the most important questions with which we deal. Thanks to Tammy Shelton for help with Safe Sanctuaries materials. My special thanks go to colleagues and friends like Walt Marcum, Kenda Creasy Dean, Brian Hardesty-Crouch, Sandy Miller, Robin Pippin, Charles Harrison, Chris Hughes, Susan King, Ron and Celia Whitler, Mike Ratliff, Mike Selleck, Lynn Hutton, Tom Salsgiver, Chuck Kishpaugh, Joy Allen, and Rod Hocott. The long hours we have talked together have helped me work through both ideas and practical solutions. They have given me opportunities to do workshops, to be in conversation with other youth workers, and to teach both the theology and the practice of youth ministry. Their wisdom and experience have greatly enriched my understanding and, in turn, the content of this book. Any errors, of course, remain my own. Finally, I want to express my deep appreciation to the Family and Life Span Team at the General Board of Discipleship of The United Methodist Church for their interest in making this book a reality. MaryJane Pierce Norton initiated the conversation, and Susan Hay gave enthusiastic support. Debra Smith is an excellent editor, and I appreciate her skill in shaping the final form.

John Gooch
Liberty, Missouri
December 2002

◆◆

