

Chapter

14

Expanding the Vision

Other Youth-Serving Organizations

Partnering with other youth-serving organizations is a way that churches can extend their ministry. Four youth agencies that are found in many local congregations are Camp Fire Boys and Girls, Boy Scouts of America, Girl Scouts of the USA, and 4-H. Each of these agencies offers a unique opportunity to minister to young people. These organizations are particularly appropriate if you are attempting to develop community-based outreach ministries for children and youth.

Boy Scouts of America

Target audience: boys, ages 7-20, and girls in Venturing, ages 14-20.

Primary emphasis: development of character, citizenship, and self-reliance through small-group activity.

Program structure: small-group structure, youth interaction with adult role models.

Special features: extensive drug prevention and youth protection programs, high adventure bases.

Girl Scouts of the USA

Target audience: girls ages 5-17 or kindergarten through twelfth grade.

Primary emphasis: leadership development, service to others, skill development, and career exploration.

Program structure: small-group structure with girl/adult partnership.

Special features: contemporary issues series, leadership institutes, math and science partnerships, national and international events.

Camp Fire Boys and Girls

Target audience: boys and girls from birth through age 21.

Primary emphasis: stresses the development of the whole child through goal setting and problem solving.

Program structure: small-group structure; youth interaction with adult role modeling.

Special features: programs for short-term subjects in addition to club programs.

4-H

Target audience: boys and girls from kindergarten through twelfth grade.

Primary emphasis: acquiring knowledge and skills for life; becoming productive in society.

Program structure: structure varies depending on type of club.

Special features: variety of programs available, including national events.

God and Country Program

The God and Country Program is the religious recognition program designed for use by the Boy Scouts of America, Camp Fire Boys and Girls, and the Girl Scouts of the USA. However, any youth who is a member of a Sunday school class, vacation Bible school, confirmation class, or other church group is welcome to use the God and Country Program, whether or not he or she belongs to a civic youth organization. To earn this award, youth need to complete the requirements in the student workbook under the supervision of a counselor (either the pastor or someone appointed by the pastor).

God and Country Programs are available for the following groups:

God and Me, grades 1-3; God and Family, grades 4-5; God and Church, grades 6-8; and God and Life, grades 9-12.

Youth Covenant Discipleship Groups

A Youth Covenant Discipleship Group is a group of approximately eight to ten youth who, together with an adult mentor, develop a covenant that states the ways in which they would like to be better disciples. The group meets weekly for about an hour to report to one another on how well they have kept the covenant during the week.

Covenant Discipleship Groups are based on the class meetings originated by John Wesley as a method of accountability and spiritual growth.

Each group's covenant has statements in four areas: acts of compassion, acts of justice, acts of worship, and acts of devotion. While each group develops its own covenant, the following sample covenant is typical for many groups.

- We will read the Bible daily.
- We will avoid talking about other people.
- We will care for our bodies.
- We will pray each day.
- We will attend worship weekly.
- We will attend our Covenant Discipleship Group weekly.

Chrysalis

Chrysalis is a three-day spiritual retreat modeled after the Walk to Emmaus. Chrysalis is open to sophomores, juniors, and seniors in high school. It is a weekend filled with surprises and heightened understanding of God's grace. Teens who attend Chrysalis can find answers to questions they have about Christian faith, prayer, Bible study, being a friend, sharing their faith with others, and being a spiritual leader in their local church. Attendance at a Chrysalis retreat requires finding a sponsor who has attended an Emmaus or Chrysalis retreat.

DISCIPLE Bible Study for Youth

DISCIPLE is a powerful model of Bible study that is focused not only on facts, but also on learning what the Bible has to say about living the life of a follower of Christ. DISCIPLE uses many different teaching techniques that appeal to the diversity of learning styles among youth and adults. DISCIPLE lasts nine months. It is not focused on reading every verse of the Bible, but is instead centered on reading major portions and understanding broad themes.

The youth edition of DISCIPLE features a small group (no more than twelve) and an adult facilitator. The group makes a covenant to read about an hour per day and to attend weekly sessions that last ninety minutes to two hours. Each week the participants make notes on their reading and share insights gained. The group then watches a twenty-minute video of a biblical scholar who speaks on the theme for the

week. The key portion of the weekly session is called "Marks of Discipleship." The group members discuss how they can apply their reading and particular disciplines to their faith life. Because of the time and commitment required, the group grows together spiritually, builds a trust level, and becomes a supportive community.

Youth Ministry Is Family Ministry

Every family is different. No measuring stick exists by which to judge families normal or abnormal. Families of youth are found in many different configurations. Some of these include:

- Single parents with children.
- Grandparents raising grandchildren.
- Foster families.
- Two parents with children.
- Blended families with children from previous marriages.
- Older siblings raising younger siblings.

The church cannot replace the family unit. However, youth ministry can strengthen and support families by being "pro family" in mission, vision, and aim. This includes:

- Communicating constantly and effectively. Communication is vital. Letting parents know what you're planning is much more effective and appreciated than depending on youth to relay information. Also share with parents/guardians the goals and vision of the youth ministry. Ask them to offer ideas of how the youth ministries can be supportive and helpful to the family.
- Remaining mindful of the tremendous scheduling pressures of most families.
- Making it easier for youth to participate in family time by scheduling fewer but higher quality events and activities.
- Providing resources and opportunities for families to be together.
- Building rapport and relationship with parents/guardians.

Being in Ministry With Families

Provide Assistance

Many parents/guardians feel unskilled and unable to do their job. The church can assist them by:

- Offering parenting classes or support groups.

- Purchasing books for personal and group study.
- Planning parent-youth discussions.
- Offering workshops on family dynamics, human sexuality, family spiritual growth, and playing together as a family.

Form Cluster Groups

Create family clusters, groups of families that gather from time to time to have conversation about what it means to be a family. Try to include in those clusters at least one family in which a parent is gifted in relating to youth. This kind of relationship will encourage growth in individual families and among all the participants.

Provide Spiritual Opportunities

Youth ministry as family ministry is faith-oriented, focused on the process of assisting families in their spiritual growth. Encourage families to worship together, pray together, and think together. Encourage families to grow together in their relationship to God.

Involve Parents in Youth Ministry

Some youth are comfortable with their parents being in a leadership situation with their youth group, while others are far less so. It is always important to ask a youth how he or she feels before inviting a parent to come along on a retreat or to accept a leadership or advisory role. Involving parents and other family members says that those people are important and that they are part of the team. Youth ministry is a team effort, a family process. Gone are the days of keeping parents and family out of youth ministry.

Remain Flexible

Family structures are continually changing. Ministry to families with teenagers is a process that requires constant listening. Specific family needs must be discovered and rediscovered through a regular system of assessment and goal setting. Adopt an attitude of flexibility and willingness to change or to modify programming.

Youth Ministry Is School Ministry

The local school system is another potential partner for ministry. Work with school administrators and teachers to promote healthy lifestyles. Attempt to plan events and activities that will complement rather than compete with school schedules. You could plan a dance or

a party to begin after a game. You could serve a meal before a play or concert. Try not to plan an important retreat or event during playoffs or exams.

While most schools do not allow adults to roam the halls, there are ways that volunteer and professional youth workers can be involved at school. Some schools will allow adults to visit students for lunch. Some schools use adult volunteers in classrooms. It is imperative that adults who want to go on school campuses receive permission from the school administration.

Other ways to support youth include playing games and attending concerts and plays. Sitting with parents at these events is a great way to build relationships with them.

Youth Support Groups

Many communities have a variety of support groups available for youth and others who have specialized needs. Usually these groups are led by those with training in a particular area. Some congregations form support groups for particular groups, providing both the facilities and leadership; and some congregations form partnerships with other community organizations to provide facilities for support groups. Putting a youth in contact with an appropriate support group is often an important ministry. Find out where the agencies are, what services are offered, what the cost (if any) is, and what the referral process is. Provide help for youth and their families by making contacts and referrals.

In many communities you will find support groups for the following:

- Survivors of violence, incest, abuse, and trauma.
- Eating disorders.
- Dealing with grief and loss.
- Youth whose parents are separating, divorcing, and re-marrying.
- Single-parent families and blended families.
- Teenage parents.
- Addicts and alcoholics.
- Teens who cannot communicate with their parents.
- Parents who cannot deal with their children constructively or positively.

Twelve Step Groups

In many communities Twelve Step groups are developing as needs are identified. These are groups for youth and adults who want to deal with addictions and behaviors in a spiritually centered environment. They are based on the Alcoholics Anonymous model of admitting powerlessness over behaviors and situations; giving them up; trusting God to help overcome them; and relying on others for insight, leadership, and encouragement.

The value of these and other groups is that they are designed to empower persons to deal with their own realities. They provide opportunities to develop coping skills and to learn life skills for living with, overcoming, and even removing, attitudes, behavior, and conditions that inhibit personal growth. Support groups restore self-confidence and self-esteem. They provide relationships and nurture.

Parachurch Ministries

The word *parachurch* is based on the Greek prefix *para*, which means "alongside of" or "beside." In our context, youth ministries that have evolved independently from any denominational ties are commonly referred to as "parachurch." Ministries such as Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Youth for Christ, Young Life, Meet at the Pole, and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship are specific examples of parachurch. These ministries are not stand-alone ministries or substitutes for congregational youth ministry. If we truly stand beside one another, how can we magnify cooperation and collaboration?

- Begin by clarifying your vision for ministry. How might parachurch ministries and local church youth ministry move toward a common vision? A shared vision is an invitation to work together. If spreading the gospel to youth is a primary goal, the parachurch group and local church youth ministry teams are colleagues, not competitors.
- Discern which teens the various groups are trying to reach. Some groups target any youth not involved with a church. Others try to reach youth in crisis by visiting jails. Some single out youth who have common affiliations, such as sports or interests in a specific kind of Bible study or faith sharing. Churches tend to relate first to youth of families who are members of the congregation. It will

serve your youth leadership team well to know who is and who isn't being addressed and cared for.

- Once visions and audiences are clear, respond creatively to the parachurch groups who work alongside and with church youth ministry. What ways can you be in ministry together? Look for points of commonality. Try to reach agreement on strategies for ministry. Foster a spirit of cooperation instead of opposition. Don't become adversarial; be an ally whenever possible.

Guarantor Ministries

Young people need to relate to mature Christian adults who model committed relationships that are not cast aside because of conflict or disappointment. Many of today's young people have not experienced this kind of enduring love. A nurturing relationship with a mentor can demonstrate the power of a committed, enduring relationship grounded in Christ and in Christian principles.

The concept of a guarantor or a mentor has been used for many centuries by craftspeople. A person wanting to learn proficiency in a particular trade would make a covenant with a master in that field. By trading labor for the privilege of learning the intricacies of his or her chosen profession, the apprentice and the guarantor achieved mutual economic and knowledge exchange. The apprentice advanced in status as he or she acquired the fine arts of his or her particular craft through hands-on experience. This was a common practice before the industrial revolution and the advent of our present school system.

A reliable and caring guarantor relationship may help a youth gain a healthy sense of self-esteem, and that in turn helps the youth cope better with life's stresses. A guarantor in a young person's life is an adult who will listen and who can be trusted with confidential information. This adult is also available to answer important questions concerning the youth's doubts, hopes, fears, and faith issues. Youth learn how to deal with adults other than parents through relationships with guarantors. In this relationship, youth have the peer-free opportunity to ask questions and to share doubts about faith and spirituality. This relationship aids youth in developing and strengthening their faith, as well as in helping them connect the faith of the church community with the reality of life.

- Following are some suggestions for developing a guarantor ministry.
- Identify adults who are willing to give the time and effort necessary to establish a nurturing relationship.
 - Invite adults to be prayer partners with youth.
 - Target at-risk youth (from both the church and the community) for long-term support, guidance, and acceptance.
 - High school juniors and seniors may benefit from either a long-term or a short-term relationship with a guarantor who helps them struggle with changes such as graduating from high school, joining the military, entering college, or joining the work force.
 - Guarantors are not limited to adult/youth partnerships. Older youth may be paired with children in specific settings, such as midweek tutoring during the school year or a summer experience at vacation Bible school.
 - Take care in advising guarantors how and where to meet. Guarantors should abide by all church policies and procedures for working with children and youth. Fast-food establishments are often good places to meet, since there are others present, and the familiarity of the setting is more relaxed.
 - Guarantors should possess high moral and ethical standards for themselves and for the youth they are mentoring.
 - The church should provide an advisor for the guarantors who can help them understand and fulfill their responsibilities.

FOR MORE HELP

For information about civic youth-serving organizations:

Boy Scouts of America
1325 West Walnut Hill Lane
P.O. Box 152079
Irving, TX 75015-2079
Website: www.bsa.scouting.org

Camp Fire Boys and Girls
Dept. W, P.O. Box 804452
Kansas City, MO 64180-4422
Website: www.campfire.org

4-H

Check with your County Extension Service.

Website: www.4h-usa.org

Girl Scouts of the USA

420 Fifth Ave.

New York, NY 10018-2798

Website: www.gsusa.org

Office of Civic Youth-Serving Agencies/Scouting

P.O. Box 859

Nashville, TN 37202-0859

Phone 615-340-7129 or 800-509-4563

To order God and Country resources or
for more information, contact:

P.R.A.Y.

8520 Mackenzie Rd.

St. Louis, MO 63123-3413

Phone 800-933-7729

Website: www.praypub.org

For information on Youth Covenant Discipleship Groups:

Together In Love: Covenant Discipleship For Youth, by David Sutherland. Published by Discipleship Resources. Available through Cokesbury (800-672-1789) or Discipleship Resources (800-685-4370); website: www.discipleshipresources.org.

For information on Chrysalis:

Additional information on Chrysalis is available at the Upper Room website: www.upperroom.org.

For information on DISCIPLE:

Information on Youth DISCIPLE is available through Cokesbury (800-672-1789).

For information on guarantor ministries:

Friends in Faith: Mentoring Youth in the Church, by Barbara Bruce and Chuck Kishpaugh. Published by Discipleship Resources. Available through Cokesbury (800-672-1789) or Discipleship Resources (800-685-4370). Website: www.discipleshipresources.org.