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**What About All Those Other Youth-Serving Agencies?****A Brief History and Overview**

The late 1800's and early 1900's brought forth an energetic social reform movement in the United States. During this time, many youth-serving organizations were started and or supported by the church. This support may have begun with the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the Christian Endeavor Society<sup>1</sup> (1880's) and continued through the scouting movement<sup>2</sup> and may even include the creation of such groups as Young Life, Youth For Christ, Fellowship of Christian Athletes and Campus Crusade for Christ, although these later groups got started in the 1940's and 1950's.<sup>3</sup> Many of these groups have survived to today and can be considered a supporting part of a congregation's youth ministry, especially since some of these organizations have maintained a close tie to local congregational youth ministry.

For example the United Methodist Church, through the United Methodist Men, has a full-time staff person who works exclusively with "youth serving agencies," primarily the Boy Scouts.<sup>4</sup> The role of this national director is to help develop and maintain church sponsorship of scouting troops as an appropriate ministry.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the Boy Scouts organization allows the "sponsoring" agency to "teach" the agency's particular religious values. Other "civic" youth organizations have not been as open as the Boy Scouts to the host organization "infusing" its program and message with the Scouting message. Some have argued that since the church or congregation does not "control" these organizations, they are not really part of the congregation's youth ministry.

Regardless of which side a person might take on that question, no one can deny the numerous groups currently in existence that attempt to minister to the youth of the land many of whom are members of individual churches. Trying to keep up with the creation of these groups is a major task that we are not sure anyone has mastered. Where was Teen Mania ten years ago, and where will it be ten years from now? Who, outside of a small group of Southern Baptists, ever heard of First Priority before 1995? Whatever happened to The Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts, a successful youth-worker oriented, weekend workshop format from the 1970's?

Adults in many Christian traditions have been concerned about the education of adult workers in youth ministry. The response to this concern among Methodists, Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and others has been to create certification training in youth ministries. Smaller and more evangelical denominations have often focused on supporting existing training programs such as SonLife, rather than on denominational efforts. Additionally, the major nondenominational publishers of youth material, Youth Specialties and Group Magazine, all offer some kind of training and "certification" program. Some of our major institutions do so as well, including Princeton, Southern Methodist University, and Wartburg Theological Seminary, to name just a few. In *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry*,<sup>6</sup> Kenda Creasey Dean and Ron Foster listed many of

these organizations and certification programs in an appendix, but even their list is incomplete and now out of date.

Although keeping up with all of the youth-serving organizations is almost impossible, we do want to highlight the potential and ways that best-practice youth ministries have been partnering with a few of them. Such congregations have found that these groups can aid them in congregational youth ministry, helping to transform individuals and society. While some of these organizations are designed to minister directly to youth (such as Young Life), others have focused more on the adult worker with youth (such as Youth Specialties).

### **Scouting and Related Movements**

#### **The Beginnings**

The Boy Scouts was first started in 1908 in England by R. S. S. Baden-Powell, a general in the British Army. The purpose of the organization was to train boys in the essentials of good citizenship, honor, and chivalry. An American businessman, William Boyce, who was visiting London in the 1909, was so impressed by the organization he brought it to America and helped found the Boy Scouts of America in 1910. In America at that time, the largest Protestant denomination was the Methodist-Episcopal Church, which quickly endorsed the concept of scouting. In 1919 it allowed scouting to be a church-sanctioned “mid-week activity” as long as the organization had proper supervision by the church. Therefore scouting was placed under the Board of Sunday Schools.

Not long after the creation of the Boy Scouts came the Girl Scouts and the Camp Fire Girls. Both were also endorsed by mainline denominations, but these organizations have not been as eager to partner with the major Christian denominations as the Boy Scouts have been, especially in contemporary times.

At around the same time the Boy Scouts began, the 4-H movement was getting started in rural America. From 1870 to 1930 the number of Americans living in towns and cities with at least 2,500 people in them went from 26% of the national population to 56%.<sup>7</sup> For many people living in farm communities, this change in demographics signaled the beginning of a slow decline of rural influence and of a rural, farming way of life. 4-H can be seen as an early and continuing response of the rural community to help young people understand and preserve their way of life. The Protestant religious community was most often a part of that way of life, so it endorsed and helped the 4-H movement. Often the religious community provided this help by hosting 4-H meetings in the small churches already spread throughout the farming communities, but more often help was given by providing the men and women who gave leadership to the movement. This partnering with the church that happened in an earlier era has gradually declined.

## **The Boy Scouts' Continuing Strong Ties with the Church**

But as the influence of the church, especially the Protestant church,<sup>8</sup> has declined within some youth-serving agencies, such as 4-H, Camp Fire Girls, and Girl Scouts, the Boy Scouts organization has tried to keep the relationship strong and powerful.

For example, in 1997, six of the top nine sponsoring agencies of Boy Scout troops were churches, with the United Methodist Church and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints leading the way. Presbyterian churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and Lutheran churches were also all heavily involved, with some participation by Baptist churches. The other sponsoring organizations in the top nine are related to the public school, including parent teacher associations, parent clubs, and the schools themselves. Without the Christian churches sponsoring, supporting, and providing leadership, the Boy Scout movement would be almost nonexistence today.<sup>9</sup>

Many of the so-called mainline churches continue to use the Boy Scouts movement as a way of being in ministry to the surrounding community. In fact, some churches see the creation of a scout troop as an evangelical tool and a mission and ministry opportunity to the youth in the greater community. A video produced by the United Methodist Church<sup>10</sup> points to several churches that have used Boy Scouts in new church development as the first congregational youth ministry being put in place.

The approach to youth ministry in scouting allows the leaders of the organization to emphasize Christian values and teachings. Several Christian groups have created various awards within scouting to lift up Christian ideals. These groups include Lutheran churches, The Eastern Orthodox churches, the Friends Program, The Christian Scientist Program, The United Methodist Church and various other independent Christian congregations.

## **Trends That May Impact the Church's Future Relationship with the Boy Scouts**

Several other relevant observations to note in this discussion of scouting and the church may impact the future of scouting as a vehicle for youth ministry. First the more "conservative and evangelical churches" have not historically participated, nor do they currently participate in this movement in any significant way. For many of these churches, the scouting movement is a nice thing (especially given the Boy Scouts stance against homosexuality). But these churches consider scouting to be unrelated to their understanding of congregational youth ministry, often because they understood youth ministry to be only about bringing young people into a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Second, the Latter-day Saints (often referred to by others as *Mormans*) have made the Boy Scouts the "official" youth ministry of their churches or "wards." Every ward is to have a Boy Scout troop. As the Latter-day Saints continue to grow and add more troops and members it will be interesting to see how this affects scouting (esp. since some might consider Mormons another religion and not part of historical Christianity). The official

policy of the Boy Scouts is that it is necessary to affirm only a belief in God. Affiliates of non-Christian religions may and do sponsor troops.

Third, the issue of homosexuality, which the Boy Scout movement has continued to face aggressively, will affect the organization in some way. The particular stand of the Boy Scouts is more in line with the churches that have not been supportive of them than those that have historically partnered with them. Despite the occasional news story, it remains to be seen whether this issue will affect the troops and the funding in a substantial way.

Fourth, the main participants in Boy Scouts, like many of the other organizations mentioned in this section, could be classified as children and not youth. Certainly the scouting movement works with young people, but the majority of their participants are now what most Americans would call children. In fact, scouting has had several new initiatives to hold on to the “older high school youth population,” such as Venturing, because many older youth leave scouting by age fourteen or so.

Fifth, it appears that the Boy Scouts organization has been most successful in suburban settings, while 4-H has been most successful in rural settings. Both organizations have small initiatives that reach out to urban settings. Some of these have worked well, but the organizations have been hard pressed to duplicate the positive results all over the country.

And last, at least for our discussion, many church leaders, having grown up through the sixties, have been reluctant to endorse the citizenship concept behind the Boy Scout movement. Wanting to be able to critique the culture, many church leaders are less inclined to support an organization that has historically been a major supporter of the culture, specially its uncritical acceptance of patriotism and war. Again, it will be interesting to observe how the new generation of leaders in the church, who did not grow up with the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movement as major shaping events, and who have grown up with a lessening of stigma attached to homosexuals, respond to Scouting and its traditional message.

In conclusion, we have seen both historically and currently how scouting in particular can be an effective outreach for a congregation’s youth ministry into the community. This outreach can bring families together, especially boys and men. The traditional message of Scouting and its youth ministry approach has allowed for the Christian message to be proclaimed as actively and loudly as the leaders wish, but the Christian message can also be ignored. Thus scouting can be an effective sideshow in a congregation’s youth ministry if the church actively engages the participants of scouting with the Christian message rather than just acting as sponsors of a troop. Many churches have also found that scouting is an effective ministry tool in their surrounding community.

### Para-Denominational Youth Movements

#### **An Overview**

While the comprehensive history of congregational youth ministries in the 1900's has yet to be written, many of us believe that at least two factors in congregational youth ministries led to the formation of para-denominational groups in the 1940's, such as Young Life, Youth For Christ, and Intervarsity.<sup>11</sup>

The first factor was that congregational youth ministries had lost much of its evangelical and missional understanding that had been a part of earlier eras. (On the other hand, some have argued that congregational youth ministry adopted the Sunday school approach rather than an evangelical/missional approach and thus never was evangelically oriented.<sup>12</sup>) As congregational youth ministry lost its evangelical thrust, those Christians who were more evangelically concerned started their own youth ministries outside of local congregations to reach unchurched young people.

The second factor leading to the formation of many of these para-denominational youth ministries in the 1940's was that mainline churches had tended to equate salvation with church membership. In contrast, the more evangelical Christians wanted young people to understand that while church participation was important, a relationship with the living God as often expressed by the words "having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ" was the most important decision they could make. (It must also be added that by the 1940s, the Calvinistic theology which included predestination, which many of the religious founders had brought to this country, was out of favor for a more "free will" interpretation of salvation. The more accepted theological stance was either Armenian or the Wesleyan interpretation of Arminius and the Roman Catholic position expressed in the Council of Trent, in which people had the ability to choose to follow God. Thus youth ministry could now focus on youth making a decision – not God making a decision.)

These new para-denominational organizations while they took slightly different approaches to youth ministry still had as their main focus to have young people "choose" Christ. For example Youth for Christ used the large evangelical preaching crusades model that was popular in youth ministry at the time, while Young Life focused on the emerging high school. Billy Graham was Youth For Christ's first full-time employee, and he honed his craft in front of young people, preaching in large arenas on Friday and Saturday nights. While Graham has been able to maintain this format, Youth For Christ has had to reinvent itself as this form of youth ministry has waxed and waned over the past sixty years.

## Young Life

Young Life focused on the growing concept of the high school. While it is difficult for those of us in youth ministry to remember a time when the high school did not control most of the waking hours of teenagers, this was not true in the 1930's and 1940's when Young Life began. At the start of the century, virtually nobody went to high school, yet by the end of the century, the country felt compelled to have every teenager attend high school. Those young people who disobeyed the compulsory attendance laws would have privileges, such as driving, removed by the government.<sup>13</sup>

This focus on high schools has proved to be fortuitous for Young Life, as high schools have played a larger and larger role in the life of American teenagers. Using the high school approach to their ministry Young Life has continued to prosper. Young Life has stated that they would like to have a chapter in 25% of the nation's high schools by 2006. While many believe that goal is unrealistic, nonetheless it drives them forward. As it has grown, Young Life has created a huge camping ministry. "Young Life's fourteen national camps, three regional camps and four wilderness programs are used for year-round camping activity by 140,000 guests a year."<sup>14</sup> Four new camps are currently being developed. While many mainline denominations have more camping facilities (it is estimated that the United Methodist Church alone owns over 250 camps), no one is funding or promoting their camping ministry as Young Life is. And no one Christian denomination has the vision of how to use camping ministry as effectively as Young Life, which reaches out to over 100,000 students each year.

Young Life has also organized a fascinating approach to congregational youth ministries called in some places a *church model*. In these settings Young Life trains and supports a staff person to do congregational youth ministry if the congregation financially supports the staff person and allows him or her to also run a local "club." A "club" is the Young Life equivalent of a local youth group that uses as its focus the youth who attend a local high school, not the youth who are members of the church. Young Life focuses on one high school and one high school only in its club pattern.

Many congregations, especially pastors, like this approach to congregational youth ministry because the Young Life-trained and supported staff person doing the congregation's youth ministry is not interested in being the pastor of the church. In the "old way" of doing youth ministry (see chapter four) in which an associate pastor does youth ministry, conflicts often arise between the "senior" and "junior" pastors. Since the youth ministry staff person has no real interest in preaching to the congregation or being involved in other congregational ministry matters, conflict with senior pastors can be avoided. Additionally Young Life provides excellent support and training of its staff people even after they are employed, something that is often missing in congregational youth ministry. *A key is that Young Life requires the staff person to meet with members of the Young Life leadership team for ongoing support, fellowship, and education.* Rarely does this approach happen in a local congregation outside the Young Life model.

This Church model has allowed many churches (particularly Presbyterian and Lutheran churches) to partner with Young Life. Other congregations endorsing the basic concept behind Young Life often support the Young Life ministry through financial gifts by its members.

In addition, we also must remember that Young Life, like many of these organizations, has been most successful in suburban white high schools. There is nothing inherently racist in the organizations themselves. However, the model is based upon young people in high school and upon teenagers and the community taking a certain pride in their high school. These two factors tend to be more prevalent in suburban settings than in urban areas.<sup>15</sup>

### Conclusion

So how do organizations like the ones discussed in this chapter relate to congregational youth ministry and best practices of youth ministry? Many congregational youth ministries do not deal with these youth-serving organizations because the organizations are not currently in the congregations' communities. Other congregational youth ministries find themselves competing, not just with one of these organizations, but with many of them. Unfortunately, *competing* is the right term because local congregations and these groups often compete for the time and attention of young people. This problem might not exist *if (1) these organizations remained true to their mission statements of bringing young people to a relationship with God and then turning them over to churches for further faith development and (2) churches would welcome these new converts and provide further faith development.* However, this is frequently not the case. It is often easier to build a para-church group that focuses on entertainment to recruit churched young people than it is to reach young people who are not open to the message of Jesus Christ.

Finally we can say that we did find places where these para-church groups were working closely with congregational youth ministries in a valuable partnership. This partnership can be worthwhile and exciting, but the partnership exists all too infrequently. The call should go out to both the churches and these organizations to meet each other regularly at the local level, and to view each other as partners not as competitors.<sup>16</sup>

Some local congregations admitted young people into their fellowship who had made commitments to Jesus Christ in youth-serving organizations. And some congregations actively followed up on youth who were engaged in scouting troops sponsored by their congregations. These congregations found they could reach out to significantly more people through partnering with various youth-serving agencies.

If you are in a local setting doing congregational youth ministries, you ought to know what is available to teenagers in your community and what type of youth-serving organizations are in the community, whether it be a Young Life group or a new teen

dance club. Through partnership we may have a better opportunity to transform both the youth and the society in which they live. In partnerships we may have a better chance to affect the lives of young people for God. We can work together, but only if we allow some theological pluralism to function. Through networking we may be able to reach more young people with the transforming message of the gospel and to surround them with God's love.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The historical start of the youth group of today. See "An Attempt at a Conclusion for Defining *Youth*" in Chapter 1 for more information.

<sup>2</sup>Some would include both the Camp Fire girls and the 4-H organization in the scouting movement.

<sup>3</sup>It can be argued that these latter groups were evangelistic off spring and reactions to a later development in congregational youth ministry in which church membership became equated with salvation rather than part of the social reform movement that got juvenile justice court system established, child labor laws enforced, mandatory public schooling in every state and Prohibition.

<sup>4</sup>Originally this staff person was in the Christian education section of the Methodist Church and then moved to the Board of Discipleship in the United Methodist Church. When facing budget cuts in the 1980's, the position was scheduled to be eliminated in the General Board of Discipleship. However, the United Methodist Men, recognizing the historical importance and the significance of the scouting ministry, undertook to save the staff position by placing it under their budget.

<sup>5</sup>Currently the National Director of this ministry is Larry Coppock, Office of Civic Youth/Scouting Ministries, General Council of United Methodist Men, United Methodist Church, PO Box 860, Nashville, Tenn.

<sup>6</sup>Upper Room Books, 1998.

<sup>7</sup>p. 364, Mark Noll, A History of Christianity in the Untied States and Canada, Eerdmans, 1992.

<sup>8</sup>Remember this is the period of time where the Roman Catholic Church is becoming the largest Christian tradition in the country through immigration, and many of its immigrants have headed to the cities of the North.

<sup>9</sup>Information from *The United Methodist Reporter*, April 4, 1997, "UMC number one in Boy Scouting in USA" by Cynthia B. Astile and conversations with Boy Scouts of America.

<sup>10</sup>"Scouting Ministry in the United Methodist Church," available through Larry Coppock, United Methodist Men, PO Box 860, Nashville, TN.



<sup>11</sup>While InterVarsity was started much earlier, it came to the United States in the 1940's. Since InterVarsity concentrated upon college campuses, it is not a part of this study of youth ministry.

<sup>12</sup>See, Mark W. Cannister, "Why Christian Education and Youth Ministry Are Different Disciplines," *American Baptist Quarterly*, March 2000.

<sup>13</sup>A variety of texts trace this issue, including Lyle Schaller, The Evolution of the American High School, Abingdon, 2000.

<sup>14</sup>From "Young Life Camp Booklet," published by Young Life, Colorado Springs, Co ..

<sup>15</sup>Some have also argued that the role of women in many of these organizations is to be inferior and subservient to men, which makes them sexist, although Young Life appears to be addressing this problem.

<sup>16</sup> This may be just wishful thinking.