

CHAPTER 8

Working with Other Youth Ministry Organizations

What can *be* one of the more frustrating or rewarding aspects of youth ministry from a congregational • w perspective is relating to other organizations in the community that are attempting to "minister" (used in a general sense of the word) to youth. The agencies attempting to minister to youth in the larger community are extensive, and this book cannot even attempt to list them all. I do want to examine some of the organizations that you are more likely to come in contact with in your congregational youth ministry. I believe that cooperation is needed between many of the organizations serving youth, but some of the organizations serving youth may have goals and objectives that are either in direct conflict or dissimilar with the goals and objectives of your local church's youth ministry.

Youth ministry from a congregational setting is never accomplished in a vacuum, but in a local community. Each local community has its own unique setting with its own set of problems and joys. Each community has differing organizations and agencies designed to support youth. Some of these organizations are unique to your local community. Other groups in your community are part of a much larger organization that may span the country or the globe.

The Juvenile Court System

The number and extent of crimes committed by youth in this country are staggering. According to one report, more crimes are committed in the United States by persons under twenty-five years old than by those over twenty-five. The statistics suggest that at least one out of every three youth will have a court date before they reach the age of eighteen.¹ Thus it is possible that members of your youth ministry may be involved in the juvenile court system.

Beginning in Cook County, Illinois, in 1899, a new concept began to take hold in the American judicial system. It was the concept that juvenile offenders ought to be treated differently than adult offenders. The court system in the United States began to believe that juvenile offenders, or wayward children, as they were thought of, were in need of protection and guidance. The court system believed that they should begin to emphasize treatment and rehabilitation and not punishment and retribution. The court's emphasis was on preventing the youth from performing a criminal act again. This concern and new way of viewing children in the court system was spurred by the growing child labor laws, compulsory school attendance laws, and the reform movements associated with each. These reforming movements had a lot of momentum, and by 1925 all the states in the union, except two, had in place a separate court system for juveniles.

The emphasis on treatment and prevention meant that over time rights that were prevalent in the adult court system, such as due process, rules of evidence, right to an attorney, and constitutional restraints, were ignored. It wasn't until the Supreme Court was forced to take action in 1967 that the juvenile court system, now firmly entrenched in the American legal process, began to give juveniles the basic rights that the adult judicial system are based on. The result of this Supreme Court decision and the criticisms of the system led to a reexamination and significant changes during the 1970s. The reforms led to what has been called the four D's:

decriminalization, which simply reinforces the concept of treatment potential of young offenders; due process, by which basic human rights . . . are restored and which ensures that a young person who comes before the court will be treated fairly and will not be forgotten; deinstitutionalization, which demands the provision of alternatives to ineffective correctional facilities; and diversion, which attempts to place children in alternative services instead of facing the juvenile system.²

Currently the differences between the two court systems are breaking down. The juvenile court system has been forced to recognize most of the due process issues that are at work in the adult court system, and a significant and growing number of serious crimes are being committed by younger and younger youth. Both of these trends have led many prosecutors to begin to question the wisdom of a separate court system for juveniles, especially for serious offenders or the delinquent side of the court system. As the traditional methods of attempting to rehabilitate juvenile delinquents (jail and probation) have proven ineffective, new alternatives to treatment and prevention are being experimented with throughout the country.

The juvenile court system deals with three distinct types of issues: the victims of neglect or abuse; status offenders; and delinquents. Status offenders are those children and youth who commit acts that, if they were adults, would not be considered breaking the law. These activities account for between 25 and 40 percent of the juvenile court caseload. These acts include such things as running away, not going to school, drinking, and sexual promiscuity.

If you are going to be involved with youth ministry, in building relationships with young people, or in advocating on their behalf, you will run into youth who are in the court system. They may be in any part of the three segments. It will be helpful to have a basic knowledge of how your state and local juvenile systems work and how you can be in ministry with the young person involved in the court system for whatever reason. A visit to your juvenile court facility and conversation with judges or lawyers over how the system works in your community ought to help you minister more fully to the youth of your congregation and community.

The Scouting Movement

A significant ministry to youth in this country has been the Scouting movement. It has usually been connected with a the local church, but many of us in the local church have forgotten the Scouting movement as a viable ministry for the youth of our congregations.

In 1908, again as part of the social reform movements sweeping the old "British Empire," the concept of training boys in the essentials of good citizenship was started by Lieutenant General R. S. S. Baden-Powell. Originally designed for boys eleven to fourteen or fifteen years in age, this organization, whose mission was expressed in the book *Scouting for Boys*, caught on quickly and spread rapidly. In two short years the concept had spread to Chile, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Sweden, France, Norway, Mexico, Argentina, and the United States. By 1916, Wolf Cubs had been

created in Great Britain for younger boys; this would be called the Cub Scouts in the United States. Eventually, older youth would be included through the addition of Explorers. By 1920, the first International Jamboree would be held, and the Scouting movement was underway.

Today the Boy Scouts of America have basic programs for boys ages six to fourteen, with Explorer Scouts (exploring career opportunities) and Varsity Scouts (high adventure) for high school students. Explorer Scouts are open to female membership, which stood about 40 percent in 1991.

Young girls were not left out of the Scouting movement. Following the pattern of the Boy Scouts, the Girl Guides was started in Great Britain. The concept was brought to the United States by Juliette Gordon Low in 1912 and became the Girl Scouts. Currently there are five divisions of Girl Scouts for girls ages five to seventeen: Daisies 5-6 years; Brownies 7-8 years; Junior Girl Scouts 9-11 years; Cadette Girl Scouts ages 12-14; Senior Girl Scouts ages 14-17. The purpose of this organization is to "inspire girls with the highest ideals of character, conduct, patriotism, and service that they may become happy and resourceful citizens" (preamble to the constitution of the Girl Scouts of the USA).

A similar organization, the Camp Fire Girls, was started by Dr. Luther Halsey Gulick and Charlotte Vetter Gulick in 1910. This organization has four divisions for girls ages seven through high school (Bluebirds, ages 7-8; Camp Fire Girls, ages 9-11; Junior High, ages 12-13; Horizon, ages 14-high school). The focus of this organization is on the concepts of work, health, and love. Several years ago this organization went coeducational, and in 1991 38 percent of its participants were male.

The Scouting movement has usually been connected with churches. Many of the lay leaders and pastoral leaders of churches were influential in the development and growth of the the movement in the United States. A majority of the Boy Scout troops meet in and are associated with a church. The Girl Scout movement and Camp Fire girls are not as connected to local churches as the Boy Scouts are, often choosing to meet in homes or at school facilities.

The United Methodist Church and the Church of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon) have led the way in the connection between the Scouting movement and churches. The United Methodist Church has more boys sponsored through its troops in Scouting than does any other organization. The Methodist Church as early as 1919 adopted Scouting as a midweek educational activity that could be considered part of the churches' educational program for youth.³

The Mormons have made the Scouting movement their official youth ministry. Thus each local "church" must have a troop. Additionally the Mormons are experimenting with their churches' paying all the fees for those youth involved in the Scouting movement sponsored by their churches.

While the United Methodists and the Mormons have been the denominations most directly involved, many other Protestant and Roman Catholic denominations in this country have been very supportive of the Scouting movement, especially the Presbyterian churches. A few denominations have tried to organize denominational groups based on the ideas of the Scouting movement.

There is a Commission for Church and Youth Agency Relationships. This Commission, essentially the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, and the Camp Fire Girls, relates Protestant and Independent Christian churches to the Scouting movement. They publish a newsletter entitled *YouthScope*, which can be received by writing P.O. Box 6900, St. Louis, MO 63123.

If a Scout troop meets in your church building, someone in the church is acknowledging that the leaders and adults of the troop are appropriate people to be leading the organization.

The acknowledgment is usually in the form of a document that someone in the church has signed, stating that the adults working with the Scouting program are of good moral character. The Boy Scout movement in particular is very eager to have support and connection between its members and the local church.

Here is a tremendous opportunity for ministry that we in many churches have overlooked in recent years. The possibility of evangelism is ripe. These young men and women in Scouting are looking for adult role models to help them build their future. What better place is there to be involved in the congregation's youth ministry?

Certainly the aspects of patriotism and the blending of God and country are problematic for some of us as Christians. However, the opportunity for ministry with these young men and women ought not to be overlooked or easily dismissed.

Independent Christian Youth Organizations

Over the past years significant ministries with young people have been established by Christians outside denominational boundaries. These groups may be alive and well in your community, or you may have never heard of these groups. These organizations may even be "competing" with your congregational-based youth ministry for the time and attention of "your" young people. These organizations and those who lead them may be working in concert with your church's youth ministry, or they may be hindering your church's youth ministry. The personalities involved at the local level will often determine the relationship and spirit of cooperation that may develop between your church's youth ministry and the ministry of these organizations.

This book makes no attempt to lift up all of these organizations but to address the more significant ones in terms of numbers of youth and adults involved and significance of their ministry in North America. You may have been a part of one of these groups when you were growing up or even today. You must decide, at a local level, how your church's ministry will be involved with these organizations. Some may welcome your help or cooperation. Others may have the idea that you are competing for the same youth. I have had both very positive and very negative experiences with many of these organizations as I've been involved in congregational youth ministry.

It must be remembered that these organizations, while they may have very fine goals, are not churches. They may have similar objectives to your congregation's youth ministry, but they are not the church. The five organizations that I examine are Young Life; Youth for Christ/International; InterVarsity Christian Fellowship of the USA; Fellowship of Christian Athletes; and Campus Crusade for Christ.

Young Life

In 1938, Jim Rayburn abandoned conventional church methods in an attempt to win a hearing from disinterested high school students. He began to hang out at school and places where youth congregate. In 1941, Rayburn, now a Presbyterian minister, and five others created Young Life as a ministry to high school students. Their express purpose was to proclaim in word and deed the Person and work of Jesus Christ to the adolescent community by any and every means as God directs. Their desire was for students to respond to Christ in a personal commitment of discipleship. To do this ministry, Young Life focuses on a particular high school. Their adults spend time at the school and establish weekly club meetings for students in various homes. Typically a club meeting involves singing, entertainment, and a brief Christian message. There is usually a smaller meeting each week, called Campaigners, for select youth that focuses on Bible study and personal discipleship growth. Young Life also has a large camping program.

The Young Life staff are responsible for raising their salaries and operating costs. They usually do this by donations from wealthy business people and whatever church contacts they have developed.

Young Life has developed a church model in which a church hires a Young Life trained and educated young adult, and the church pays that person's salary. This person has the responsibility of running the weekly club in a local high school and of running the church's youth ministry. This model has been well received in parts of Florida and Minnesota.

Campus Crusade for Christ, International

This organization was founded in 1951 by Bill and Vonette Bright at the UCLA campus. Its goal is to help fulfill the Great Commission. They attempt to do this by a multiplication theory ("each one reach one," and so on). The organization sees itself as an arm of the church in evangelism and discipleship. Its focus is mainly on college and university students, although it has ministries that work in a variety of areas, including prison ministry. This group also appears to be dependent upon church members for financial support. The organization primarily wants a person to say the words, "I accept Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior."

Fellowship of Christian Athletes

In 1947, Presbyterian minister S. H. Shonefelt invited young student/coach Don McClannen to speak three minutes in his church on "Making Your Vocation Christian." From that invitation grew the organization known as the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, officially founded by Dr. Louis Evans, Jr. The purpose of the organization is to confront athletes and coaches with the challenge and adventure of following Christ and serving Christ through the fellowship of the church and their vocational choices.

High school chapters, or "Huddles," and college "Fellowships" are the basic ministry, with coaches being involved at various levels. Support opportunities for interested adults have been created, and the organization has been publishing a bimonthly magazine and newspaper.

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship

This organization grew out of the student movement in England in the 1870s. The deep concern for the spiritual needs of students by students led to local groups being formed on campuses. The movement reached the United States in the late 1930s and early 1940s. The group tends to focus on students and faculty members of colleges and universities, encouraging them to grow spiritually through prayer and study of the Bible. The fellowship is quite interested in publishing and has an extensive list of books, pamphlets, and a monthly magazine. This organization depends on church members for financial support.

Youth for Christ

This organization was founded in 1945 with a seven-point doctrinal program. It was an outgrowth of the Saturday night rallies that swept the country in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Billy Graham was its first full-time field worker. The organization has moved away from large weekly evangelical rallies and focuses now on Campus Life Clubs for high school students.

It has a ministry to young people involved in the legal system. This ministry, called Youth Guidance, focuses on youth in jails and youth homes, and operates with court referrals. Youth for Christ wants young people to understand and accept the person, work, and teachings of Jesus Christ. It publishes *Campus Life* magazine and a number of other resources.

One or more of these organizations may be active in your local community. Most of these organizations came about because those who founded them believed the church was not fulfilling part of its mission: to bring the message and love of Jesus Christ to young people. More often than not these perceptions were accurate. However, having all of these organizations in "competition" with congregational youth ministry is problematic. Hopefully, we can all work together toward similar, but not always the same, goals.

In your local community it would be helpful for you to be in contact with those independent youth-ministry focused organizations. Many of them have the expressed goal of getting young people connected to a local church after they have been "saved." Whether these organizations are able to do this is always a large question. In those communities where the local leaders take this goal seriously, your participation and help will generally be welcomed and applauded. In other places, the "competition" for the same young people to be in attendance and active will lead to less cooperative forms or possibilities of ministry.

It must be noted again that these organizations are not the church. While they may have laudable goals, they may approach youth ministry with differing objectives and goals than those of your congregation's youth ministry. At times, these organizations may stress loyalty to themselves over loyalty to a church or even Christ. Many of these organizations have a highly developed Christology while their understanding and communication of the doctrine of the Trinity is underdeveloped. The Old Testament is rarely discussed except to point toward Christ's coming. Most of these organizations have been slow to respond to women in positions of leadership. Many of the organizations have had significant trouble relating their "tactics" to urban youth and ethnic minority youth. They are usually much more successful with white, middle- to upper-middle-class youth in suburban settings. A few of these organizations are trying to tackle this issue head-on. Those efforts have not always been successful, but they are laudable.⁴

Youth Ministry Resourcing Groups

A significant number of youth ministry resourcing groups have arisen outside those sponsored or designed by denominational efforts. Many of these arose when denominations cut back on budget expenditures in the late 1960s. Two of these organizations are quite well known and have been in business for over twenty years. They are *Group* magazine and its spin-off endeavors, and Youth Specialities. These two organizations have created a very extensive and helpful network. They have gone from producing resources for adult workers to youth, to publishing youth ministry material, to working directly with youth. Many of us in congregational youth ministry use their resources, especially when it comes to youth groups. Not only have these two groups flourished, but also they have inspired a number of similar organizations all over the country. Some will be around for a while; others will quickly go out of business.

The ability of these groups to sell material and attract customers, who are usually local church people doing youth ministry, should point to the tremendous concern for youth ministry in the local congregation. Denominations have begun to take notice and are trying to respond to the needs of local congregations. However, the very mechanics of how large denominational structures create curriculum resources sometimes hinders denominational ability to respond and compete with these organizations. These organizations are usually centered on charismatic individuals who build up a body of

disciples. Also, these organizations can respond very quickly to the changing youth climate, fads, and needs. Denominations tend to respond much less quickly in curriculum development and to shun developing programs around specific individuals and their talents.

Many local church leaders use the materials these organizations publish and sell without any sense of the objectives of the materials. Of course, many of these adults don't have a sense of what the objectives of their own youth ministry are either (see chapter 3). This leads to situations where the material being used is not in harmony with the implicit or explicit goals and objectives of the congregation's youth ministry. In the extreme case, the local church allows one of these group's material to set the goals and objectives for its congregational youth ministry. (Yes, local churches can also be guilty of allowing denominational resources to set their goals and objectives.)

I have used and will continue to use material from a tremendous variety of sources, including those I have discussed here. However, I use this material only when it supports previously established intentions (goals and objectives). Sometimes the material needs special handling or adaptation to fit the local youth ministry goals and objectives. Congregational youth ministry leaders need to be more particular and more careful about the material we use in our youth ministry and our youth groups.

Support Groups

A growing part of the North American culture is the self-help group. Any listing in a major newspaper shows an unbelievable array of these groups. The popularity of these groups has encouraged and enabled many of them to reach into the adolescent population. In the local community near where I live, there are self-help groups for teens who are from divorced situations; who have stepmoms or stepdads; whose parent(s) has been killed; who have been abused; who have a drinking problem (AlaTeen); who have a drug problem; or who have eating disorders. And the list might be longer in your community. Many of these groups have had successful ministries with young people. Some of the young people who are in the youth ministry of your congregation might need the specialized help these groups can provide, or they might already be involved in one or more of these groups.

The task of compiling a complete list of these organizations and their services is beyond the scope of this work. However, I encourage you to learn about the groups in your local community, especially if you have young people who might be candidates for the specialized ministry they can offer.

Interest Groups

Likewise, the number of interest groups that are available for teens is amazing. From athletics to music, each community has a wide cadre of available interest groups for teens to participate in. Some of these are offered through the schools or through adult organizations, such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), or through community-based organizations, such as 4-H. The 4-H groups probably have more youth involved than any other youth serving agency in the country. They ask young people to focus on projects of their choice and to learn about food, nutrition, health, fitness, food preservation and preparation.

Often these interest groups compete with your ministry for the time, interest, and attention of the teens in your community. At times, your local church's ministry will "lose" teens to the specialized interests of these groups. Rather than bemoaning the growth of all of these groups, you may do well to see whether you can work with some of them. Often these groups are able to provide a special sense of self-worth and identity to teens who are desperately searching for some way to be unique, for some way to be recognized as special. While our theology affirms the uniqueness and specialness of each individual in God's creation, a special talent that can be developed by an interest group can help that knowledge become real and not an abstraction. Some major youth organizations include:

ASPIRA—supports Hispanic youth in the pursuit of education.

Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America—primarily a mentoring organization that provides same-sex role models for youth.

Boys and Girls Clubs of America—sponsors national sports programs and has at its core health and physical fitness goals.

COSSMHO—The National Coalition of Hispanic Health and Human Service Organizations, founded by community-based mental health professionals to improve services for Hispanics.

Future Homemakers of America—national vocational student organization, open to junior and senior high school students enrolled or previously enrolled in home economics. It focuses on youth-centered leadership and teaching leadership skills.

Girls Incorporated—offers a broad scope of activities in life management pertinent to girls.

National Network of Runaway and Youth Services—offers shelter and counseling to young people.

National Urban League—has some concerns with teens that tend to focus on pregnancy prevention and parenting skills, as well as drug concerns.

Outward Bound Schools—provide wilderness opportunities for youth 14 years and older to develop self-confidence, leadership skills, and the ability to work with others.

Rotary International, Interact Clubs—provides a youth organization designed to give young people the opportunity to work together in a world fellowship dedicated to service and international understanding.

Salvation Army—includes the Girls Guard and Adventure Corps, which focuses on health-related issues.

YMCA of the USA—focuses on building healthy minds, bodies, and spirits, usually through its physical facilities and related programs.

YWCA of the USA—creates opportunities for women's growth, leadership, and power.⁵

One of my students was pastoring a small church, fewer than 100 members, in a very rural county. He lamented that there was no youth ministry in his church. As we talked, I discovered that a very active 4-H group was meeting in his church. I asked him about this group, and he admitted he didn't know very much about it. The next week he excitedly told me that the 4-H group was led by some committed adults, all members of

the church he was pastoring. He began to show up at the meetings, getting to know the youth and observe their projects. While there is still not a regular youth group meeting at the church, the pastor discovered a flourishing youth ministry right under his nose. Now he holds a youth gathering once a month, which attracts all the youth from the community, especially the 4-H'ers. The last time I heard from him, the monthly meeting was averaging over eighty in attendance.

We in the church have an opportunity to reach thousands of young people by networking and cooperating with agencies doing youth work in our communities. Don't let this opportunity escape your congregation's youth ministry. Work with the Scouts or the parachurch groups or the interest groups, if they are willing to work with you and your congregation's youth ministry. After all, the work is done for the glory of God, not just for us or our church.

