

TEENAGERS MATTER

*Making Student Ministry
a Priority in the Church*

MARK CANNISTER


Baker Academic
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Grand Rapids, Michigan

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To Kasey and Ryan:
these teenagers matter most

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SERIES PREFACE

In many ways, youth ministry has come of age. No longer seen as “a stepping-stone to real ministry in the church,” especially in North America, youth ministry is now seen as a viable career option. Over the last few decades a wide range of professional resources, conferences, periodicals, and books have been developed on this topic. Most Christian colleges and seminaries now offer a variety of courses—if not degree programs—in youth ministry. Youth ministry has all it needs to continue to push the church to care about and serve the needs of the young in God’s name, except for one thing: we have a long way to go to develop a rich, broad, and diverse conversation that frames, defines, and grounds our missional call.

There is good news, of course. There is a professional organization, Association of Youth Ministry Educators, that sponsors an annual conference and publishes a solid emerging journal. Several thoughtful books have helped to shape the discipline’s future. There are also now two major publishers who have academic lines dedicated to furthering the field of youth ministry. We have made great progress, but we must all work together to continue deepening our understanding of what youth ministry should be.

The purpose of Baker Academic’s Youth, Family, and Culture series is to raise the level of dialogue concerning how we think about, teach, and live out youth ministry. As a branch of practical theology, academic youth ministry must move beyond a primarily skills-based focus to a theologically driven expression of a contextualized commitment of the local church to a targeted population. James Fowler defines practical theology as “theological reflection and construction arising out of and

giving guidance to a community of faith in the *praxis* of its mission. Practical theology is critical and constructive reflection leading to ongoing modification and development of the ways the church shapes its life to be in partnership with God's work in the world."¹ And as Scott Cormode reminds us, we must not shirk our calling, but "must strive to nurture leaders that are faithful. . . . Schools must prepare leaders to translate this faithfulness into effective action."² This is precisely what those of us who are called to engage the church in theological reflection of contemporary youth and family issues must do—develop a practical theology that takes seriously the reality of the context we are in, regardless of how and where it takes us. This is the future of youth and family ministry in the church.

Chap Clark
Fuller Theological Seminary
September 2013

PREFACE

Teenagers matter! When teenagers matter, the church comes alive! Teenagers bring life and vitality to nearly every sector of society when they are valued. Have you ever been in a nursing home when a group of teenagers arrive to sing Christmas carols to the residents? The place comes alive. Have you ever witnessed teenagers playing with children in an orphanage? The place comes alive. Have you participated in a Youth Sunday when teenagers lead the whole congregation in worship? The church comes alive! When they feel valued, young people bring an innate vitality to every setting.

Schools that value teenagers are filled with energy and enthusiasm. Schools that don't are boring and underachieving. Sports teams coached by people who value teenagers are vibrant and exciting communities for the participants. Coaches who care more about winning than about the players create teams filled with hostility and animosity that spectators often find hard to watch. Music and drama groups in which teenagers matter are filled with joy. When the performance becomes more important than the performers, the joy turns to fear and the audience can feel the difference. When teenagers matter, they bring life and vitality to the very fabric of a community.

Student ministry in the church has come a long way in the last century. In 1881, Francis Clark sensed a need to pay special attention to the young people in his church in Portland, Maine, and created the Society for Christian Endeavor. Soon thereafter, nearly every denomination created a youth society to ensure that their young people would stay connected to the local church. Despite the leaders' best intentions, these efforts

proved unsustainable, and churches in the twentieth century found it difficult to maintain strong connections to their young people.

Parachurch organizations such as Young Life and Youth for Christ arose to reach students who had left the church or had never been a part of the church. Although they are successful by almost any measure, the Achilles' heel of most parachurch efforts is integrating young people into the local church. This is not due to a lack of effort on the part of parachurch organizations. Often, parachurch organizations have made heroic efforts to integrate their young people into local churches—only to find churches less than receptive to their efforts.

Why such a lack of partnership between church and parachurch? Why are most churches failing to reach out to young people beyond their own walls and failing to partner with organizations that are faithfully doing this work? While most churches today have some sort of ministry for their teenagers, few have made student ministry a high priority. Few have developed a comprehensive view of student ministry, and those that do are often unable to attain the resources necessary to fully implement the depth and breadth of their vision. The inability of most churches to develop a comprehensive student ministry that both nurtures teenagers growing up in the church and reaches out to teenagers beyond the walls of the church seems to be, first and foremost, a matter of priority in the church.

Any given church contains numerous influential stakeholders: elders and deacons, pastoral staff, parents of teenagers, and financial supporters. As influencers of church vision, we stakeholders have a couple of significant decisions to make. We can choose to value teenagers and applaud the life-giving breath they bring to every aspect of the church, or we can choose to lock our teenagers away in a youth program for seven years so that they don't mess up anything. Too often we have chosen the latter approach: we develop wonderful age-appropriate programs for teenagers while isolating them from the greater community of the church. In addition, we can choose to simply provide a safe place for *our* teenagers to grow in the faith, or we can choose to also reach out to the vast teenage population in our local community who have no church connections. When we engage teenagers in the whole life of the church and reach out to those in our communities, we must provide the resources necessary to achieve such a bold vision.

When teenagers matter, everything changes! But it takes boldness to make teenagers a priority in the church. Bill Hybels describes the necessity of making such bold moves in the church: "As the years went by, my teammates and I began to notice that the primary reason we were

making significant progress as a church was that we had enough people making ‘bold moves.’ They were thinking fresh thoughts, pioneering new programs, and trusting God to accomplish significant kingdom-building activity in their midst.”¹ Does this have a familiar feel to it? Have you ever been engaged in a church that made a bold move in the direction of teenagers? Has God called you to lead such a bold move in the years to come? I hope this book brings you to the point of answering that last question with a resounding yes!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The genesis of this book dates back to my own teenage years, when I crossed paths with some faithful people who believed that teenagers mattered and that I mattered to them and to God. When I was a teenager, Mike Henning taught me what it means to have a relationship with Christ and contribute to the community of the church. As an emerging adult, I learned what it meant to be a leader working alongside Jim Welch in every aspect of ministry imaginable. Throughout my years in ministry, my friend Chuck Rosemeyer was a constant reminder of the importance of leadership development and networking. Interestingly enough, these three men were each involved in both local church and parachurch ministries. These dual involvements brought a comprehensive view to every aspect of their work in student ministry, which no doubt has influenced my own thinking about student ministry and the church over the past thirty-some years.

The student ministry leaders with whom I have served shoulder to shoulder over the years have all contributed to the formation of my thinking about adolescents and ministry. Kip Crumrine, Mike Dunlap, Rob Melgard, Gary Wieder, Ted Melnyk, Patrick Dominguez, Beth Ruzanic, Todd Szymczak, and Andrew Breton, to name a few, have thus contributed to many of the thoughts expressed in this book. Likewise, the robust conversations among those with whom I have served on the board of elders at Grace Chapel over the years have helped me clarify many of my perspectives on ministry.

This book certainly would not have been possible without the support, encouragement, and assistance of my colleagues at Gordon College. I am thankful to Mark Sargent, former provost of Gordon College, for his

encouragement and for the college's generous sabbatical program, which afforded me the concentrated time to research and write this book. This uninterrupted time would not have been nearly as productive without the support of my wonderful friends and colleagues whose offices flank my own. Bob Whittet protected me from countless distractions by absorbing my departmental responsibilities while I was on sabbatical, and Sharon Galgay Ketcham sharpens my thinking every week with gracious, insightful, and challenging conversations. Lastly, my administrative assistant, Elisabeth Whittet, spent countless hours proofreading and editing the manuscript, bringing clarity and consistency to many of my sometimes incoherent thoughts.

I called upon a variety of former Gordon College students to deliver some wisdom from the trenches. These youth ministers crafted discussion questions for each chapter and contributed sidebars throughout the book. I am indebted to the thought-provoking contributions of these Gordon College alumni: Andrew Beach, Andrew Breton, Niki Brodeur, Sarah Dickinson, Chad Fransen, Kirsten Gillette, Alan Inacio, Leah Knight, Mike McGarry, Kori North, Seth Philbrick, Adam Rowe, Morgan Schmidt, Aaron Stetson, Todd Szymczak, Ryan Ventura, Garrett Walston, and Kendra and Nathaniel Williams.

I especially want to thank my wife, Nancy, my daughter, Kasey, and my son, Ryan, for giving me the space to work at home in peace and tranquility. I am grateful for the role model that Nancy is as a loving mother of two teenagers, and I am constantly in awe of Kasey and Ryan, who make great contributions to our home, our church, their high school, and our community on a regular basis. They demonstrate that teenagers are truly treasures to behold.

Finally, to Chap Clark, Bob Hosack, and the entire team at Baker Academic, without whom this project would never have seen the light of day: thank you for your personal encouragement, wisdom throughout the process, and excellence in publishing.

INTRODUCTION

Student ministry is a moving target.¹ You have to keep pace with the culture. Teenagers today are not the same as teenagers ten, twenty, or thirty years ago. Sound familiar? As a group, youth leaders are not big on tradition—at least that’s what they say. But if you scratch the surface, you will quickly find a different story. The fact is that youth ministers are fastidious followers of tradition, doing things in student ministry today that worked for earlier generations of youth leaders. And as I can attest, that can be very healthy indeed.

I came of age as a teenager with bell-bottom jeans, leisure suits, and the classic music of the 1970s. Bruce Springsteen declared that we were “Born to Run,” Led Zeppelin was building a “Stairway to Heaven,” the Eagles moved into “Hotel California,” John Lennon could only “Imagine,” and Stevie Wonder was filled with “Superstition.” We were the coolest generation, radically different from our parents and more sophisticated than the rebels of the 1960s. We had it all figured out, and student ministry in that era was much different than it is today. Or was it?

One of the most memorable things from my teenage years is the weekly breakfast my youth leader had with my friends and me. He drove around town early in the mornings, picking us up before school to have breakfast and talk about God. Nothing heavy—just breakfast and a conversation—but I wouldn’t have missed it for anything, not even sleep. A decade later, I was a youth minister doing the same thing with kids: breakfast at Wendy’s every Wednesday morning before school for a time of sharing, perhaps a devotional, and prayer. If I canceled a week, I heard about it. “You can cancel youth club, cancel church, and cancel the retreat, but *never* cancel breakfast,” kids warned.

Fast-forward to 2013. My daughter is in high school and loves to sleep in. Getting her out of bed requires a nuclear weapon—except on Wednesday mornings! What happens on Wednesday mornings? Breakfast with youth leaders, of course! She’s up and out to breakfast by 6:00 a.m., ninety minutes before school begins.

Some things in ministry transcend cultural changes. Most often they are timeless principles of ministry, but occasionally programs that are deeply rooted in core principles have also transcended shifts in culture. Before we get ahead of ourselves, let’s consider four core principles that student ministry has embraced in one form or another over the last century: clarity of purpose, authentic leadership, the transformation of lives, and genuine relationships.

Clarity of Purpose

Where there is no vision, the people perish. (Prov. 29:18 KJV)

From the very beginning, ministry to teenagers was marked by a clear sense of purpose.² Men and women of integrity sought to help young people. The YMCA movement in America (1851) aimed to help young people maintain their faith after they moved to the city. Francis Clark’s Society for Christian Endeavor (1881) in Portland, Maine, strove to strengthen the faith journey of his young people. The chief goal of Evelyn McClusky’s Miracle Book Clubs and Torrey Johnson’s Youth for Christ was to reach out to youth with the gospel of Christ. These early ministries helped set the stage for contemporary student ministry, and each subscribed to a bold sense of purpose. Perhaps Mike Yaconelli said it best when he declared: “Youth ministry is about bringing kids into the presence of Jesus Christ.”³

This sense of clear purpose has marked student ministry from the beginning, and each time student ministry has veered off course, it has been, in part, because of confusion of purpose—not unlike the church in general. In the late 1990s, Doug Fields operationalized this concept for youth leaders in the best-selling student ministry book of all time: *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry*.⁴ Fields was able to articulate for the student ministry world what most youth workers intuitively knew to be essential but struggled to implement. Merton Strommen’s exhaustive research confirmed the importance of this principle, as 2,416 youth workers declared that a “clearly stated mission” was one of the most critical aspects of a successful student ministry; without it, they would be lost in a fog.⁵

Mark DeVries has recently confirmed the importance of this principle, based on consultations with over one hundred churches striving to reengineer their student ministries.⁶ Simply put, if you have not discovered the purpose of your ministry or if you are unable to communicate that purpose to students, volunteers, parents, supervisors, and colleagues with absolute clarity, then your ministry will eventually run out of steam. I strongly suspect that every person you consider a hero in student ministry has developed his or her ministry on this timeless principle: clarity of purpose.

Authentic Leadership

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. (Phil. 3:12)

By the 1920s, high schools had emerged in most communities, and young people were developing a sense of pride and spirit in their local schools. While churches were running “youth societies” modeled after Francis Clark’s Christian Endeavor ministry, people like Lloyd Bryant, Percy Crawford, and Oscar Gillian were reaching out to young people through radio shows and youth rallies. The youth rallies of the 1930s and 1940s were wildly successful, as thousands of young people came to faith through the bold preaching of youth evangelists like Billy Graham, who began preaching at Youth for Christ rallies in 1944.

In the youth rally era, we find leaders marked by an incredibly high level of authenticity. The Apostles’ Creed reminds us of the trinitarian nature of God and the triune community we are called to foster. In keeping with this calling, leaders networked with one another and shared ideas freely. This spirit of cooperation and united purpose caused speakers at rallies to declare, “It’s much easier to preach in Youth for Christ meetings than any other place, as the power of the Holy Spirit is felt so much.”⁷ Faithful youth workers have always embraced one another with humility, caring little about who received credit for the movement’s successes. David Chow opens his book *No More Lone Rangers* by recounting the movie *Remember the Titans*, in which Denzel Washington plays a football coach who, amid racial conflict, galvanizes his team to win the state championship.⁸ Teamwork and unity win the day in football and in ministry.

Yaconelli proclaims, “To be effective youth workers, we have to be real—not perfect, whole, together, complete, or competent—but real.

We do not need to be afraid to show others we are imperfect. We should not fear exposing our messiness."⁹ Authenticity requires us to teach the whole counsel of God, even the messy passages of Scripture. Authentic youth workers are great listeners and care more about entering into a student's story than "fixing" her problem. To be authentic, we must also be humble—willing to admit that we don't know all the answers but willing to work through issues.

Sixty some years ago, student ministry pioneers had the audacity to be creative and experiment with new ideas while remaining teachable and righteous before God. Trusting the Holy Spirit to guide them in ministry, these leaders found that this principle of authenticity served them well. With the same spirit, Youth Specialties (1969) and Group Publishing (1971) were created to provide resources for youth leaders in churches. Youth Specialties founders Mike Yaconelli and Wayne Rice, who also founded *YouthWorker Journal*, used the resources they had developed with Youth for Christ to bring relationally driven, Christ-centered, biblically based student ministry to their churches, and immediately began sharing their ideas with other youth workers through their *Ideas* books. Similarly, Thom Schultz started a student ministry resource exchange through his *Group* newsletter. Over the next decade, student ministry grew exponentially through the resources, seminars, and conventions offered by Youth Specialties and Group.¹⁰ For nearly half a century, these organizations have trumpeted the *High School Musical* theme song: "We're All in This Together!"

Transformation of Lives

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Cor. 5:17)

While Francis Clark's Christian Endeavor movement was established on a firm foundation of biblical teaching and an unwavering commitment to Jesus Christ, most denominational youth societies of the early 1900s drifted from those principles and began to emphasize leadership training and the uniqueness of their denominational positions. Training up the next generation of Presbyterians or Methodists or Lutherans or Baptists became more important than raising up the next generation of Christ-followers. Later, the nondenominational youth rallies and radio ministries of the 1930s and 1940s reclaimed the christocentric biblical foundation of student ministry, emphasizing life-changing transformation as central to its mission.

Transformation has always been at the heart of student ministry. Strommen's research found this to be as true today as it was in the past.¹¹ Call it what you will—evangelism, discipleship, spiritual formation, or Christian education: the bottom line is transforming lives with the message of God's grace. Transformation always begins with compassion for teenagers and a passion to introduce them to the life-giving message of the gospel. For decades, faithful youth leaders have worked tirelessly to clearly communicate the Word of God and engage students in formative experiences.

If our aim is to bring students into the presence of Jesus Christ, then reaching students who are currently outside the presence of Jesus Christ is imperative. These teenagers can be found both inside and outside of the church. We don't need to look far to find them—they are everywhere. And the desire to reach them has been a source of the most creative and effective programs in student ministry history. Of course, we are not simply in the salvation business, and we cannot assume our work is done following the recitation of a prayer accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior. On the contrary, the work has just begun. Conversion is merely the starting point of the long and costly journey of sanctification that, as shepherds, we must nurture through the community of believers. This dichotomy between evangelism and discipleship has plagued student ministry for ages. Perhaps in the twenty-first century we will overcome this debate and emerge with a more holistic view of ministry that acknowledges the interdependence of the two. The truth is that, as Lee Vukich and Steve Vandegriff suggest, "the aims of youth ministry are no different than the aims of the local church."¹² If God is not transforming lives through our ministry, then perhaps we are not doing ministry at all.

Genuine Relationships

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.
(John 1:14 Message)

Even as the youth rallies were in full swing, another style of student ministry was emerging in the 1930s. In Portland, Oregon, Evelyn McClusky began teaching the Bible conversationally by using storytelling. For McClusky, the Bible was a storybook filled with the great dramas of God and God's people. She assumed that her students had yet to encounter these dramas in any meaningful way, and she mesmerized young people by recounting the grand narrative of the Scriptures. Instead of mounting

the stage of a youth rally, she gathered young people in the intimate atmosphere of her living room for what became the Miracle Book Club movement. This conversational style of teaching and relational style of ministry stood in stark contrast to the youth rallies, which were often marked by brazen preaching to massive crowds.

McClusky's clubs spread across the country like wildfire and attracted the attention of Jim Rayburn, who became a Miracle Book Club leader in Dallas, Texas, before launching Young Life in 1940. Rayburn mastered the art of conversational preaching and quickly abandoned youth rally programs in favor of a community-centered youth club, which was larger than a Miracle Book Club but smaller than a youth rally. The clubs were, and continue to be, large enough to establish a critical mass that provides energy and enthusiasm but small enough to ensure the development of personal relationships. Even Youth for Christ, the king of the youth rally movement, established clubs to teach students the importance of personal evangelism and discipleship. As the large rallies gave way to the club movement in Youth for Christ, numerous additional club-type organizations sprang up.

Relying on the incarnational model of Christ and a trinitarian view of God, youth leaders for nearly a century have valued community as the primary context of transformation. To this day, the Young Life leadership manual declares the importance of genuine relationships: "Ideally, we go to young people for the same reason Christ came to humanity: to reveal God to them with no strings attached. To love them in order to get the opportunity to preach to them is a string. We should love them because God loves them and wants to love them through us."¹³ Developing avenues of relational connection has been a timeless principle of student ministry.

Doug Fields observes that we are surrounded by relationships and should strive to foster community through ministry.¹⁴ Fields writes, "Relationships are the backbone of all our values."¹⁵ Teenagers have a deep desire for community and a strong appetite for relationships. Their faith formation is, according to Chap Clark, a "complex journey, and adolescents need someone who will walk alongside them as long as it takes."¹⁶ At times in our history, youth ministry workers have abused relationships, even out of seemingly good intentions. Thankfully, Andy Root, in his *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry and Relationships Unfiltered*, has offered an essential course correction regarding relational student ministry that will assist twenty-first-century youth leaders in relating to students and families with the highest level of integrity.¹⁷

Why have the student breakfasts mentioned earlier transcended time? Because they are highly relational, and relational ministry has been the hallmark of student ministries since the mid-1930s. When all else fails in ministry—take some students to breakfast.

Our Beacons of Light

I live just a few miles from the Atlantic Ocean, and lighthouses mark our rocky coastline. The lights have been there for decades, serving as beacons to sailors on ships whose vision is, at times, diminished by the fog. Likewise, these foundational principles—*purpose*, *authenticity*, *transformation*, and *relationships*—have stood the test of time. When it seems as if the fog has settled on our ministries, these principles continue to serve as beacons of light.

When Teenagers Matter:
STUDENT MINISTRY THRIVES

Back in 2001, 181 million disposable cameras were sold in the United States, while only 7 million digital cameras were sold. Jonathan Kaplan and Ariel Braunstein recognized this gap in the market as an opportunity for a new type of camera. They formed Pure Digital Technologies and created an inexpensive, single-use digital camera. The idea was flawed from the start, as it required the customer to return the camera to the retailer, usually a pharmacy, for processing. While the company sold over three million cameras, few people returned them for processing. Some people were delighted to keep the camera and simply view the pictures on the 1.4-inch LCD screen, while others figured out how to open the camera and download the pictures to a computer themselves. The lack of returns ruined the company's business model, but Kaplan and Braunstein learned a valuable lesson: customers will sacrifice quality for an inexpensive device. Even today, the majority of cameras sold are inexpensive point-and-shoots, while single-lens reflex (SLR) cameras attract only serious amateurs and professional photographers. For the majority of the world, point-and-shoot cameras are good enough.¹

The “Good Enough” Principle

The principle of “good enough” is well understood in business, especially the technology business. A product needs to be just good enough to meet the consumers’ needs. This “good enough” concept relies on the Pareto Principle, named after the Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto. This principle is also known as the 80/20 rule. It suggests that 20 percent of the features of a product will satisfy 80 percent of the customers, making the product good enough. If you have an SLR camera and are not a professional photographer, think of all the features you never use. The reality is that 80 percent of the population tends to be satisfied with 20 percent of the features of high-end products. This produces a massive market for “good enough” products like point-and-shoot cameras.

In the church, we often settle for “good enough” student ministries. The vast majority (80 percent) of stakeholders in most churches, including pastors, elders, deacons, parents, and students, tend to be satisfied with the small slice (20 percent) of a comprehensive student ministry that is typically known as discipleship. This kind of student ministry is good enough because it is economical and it delivers the slice of ministry desired by most Christian parents with teenagers: safety.

Many Christian parents are filled with an exorbitant level of fear concerning the influence of secular culture. In an effort to protect their children, some become “helicopter parents,” hovering over their children from an early age through young adulthood in an attempt to let no decision or activity go unchecked. Some parents strive to protect their children from the influences of secular education by opting for Christian schools or homeschooling. While not all shun public schools or become helicopter parents, responsible Christian parents do strive to socialize their children with a particular set of normative values that reflect the faith and practice of their particular theological tradition. This desire of Christian parents to infuse their teenagers with the values of their faith, coupled with their fear of the influences of secular culture, produces a view of the church as a place where their teenager is safely protected from the culture while soaking in the core values of the faith. Pete Ward describes this effect on student ministry: “Parents are concerned that their children should be protected and kept safe from what they regard as the disturbing and dangerous world, which threatens to engulf them during adolescence. In this context youthwork becomes the means by which Christian parents seek to extend their influence on teenagers who are seeking more independence and freedom from the home.”² Most

Beyond the Trap of “Good Enough”

As a youth pastor, I too fall into the trap of running a “good enough” ministry. If the parents are happy, the pastor is happy and my job is safe. But this is not what I was called to do, as a Christian or as a youth pastor. Since day one, my senior pastor’s wife has challenged me to “Be bold!” I realize the “good enough” mentality I wrestle with comes from a spirit of fear. It is only when I start spending more time with Jesus on a consistent basis that I see the vision God has for the student ministry of our church. It is not about having greater numbers of students every year. It is about having an obedient student ministry that follows the example of Jesus Christ. Doing so will potentially bring push-back and confusion, but I am learning to keep my eyes on Jesus. Jesus hasn’t called me to live a “good enough” life or lead a “good enough” ministry—and for that I am grateful.

Ryan Ventura, Walnut Hill Community Church,
Bethel, Connecticut

student ministries respond to these parental desires, offering a safe haven of encouragement and support.

While teaching a class for parents of teenagers, I assembled a panel of exemplary parents to share their wisdom. Responding to a question from the audience about keeping teenagers out of trouble, one of the panelists replied, “Keep them busy!” Her point was that if teenagers are involved in enough activities, they won’t have idle time to get into trouble. She went on to say that this is what she really appreciates about the church youth group. It was a safe alternative to the other possibilities on any given Friday night. I know she appreciated the student ministries of the church for more than just being a safe place, but every parent in that room resonated with her response. It wasn’t long before parents were asking questions and making suggestions for how the student ministries could provide more activities that would, ostensibly, protect their teenagers. Christian parents tend to desire a student ministry that will protect their teenagers and instill their faith values. For them, that is good enough.

The Problems of “Good Enough”

When we produce a student ministry that is only good enough to service the desires of Christian parents, we fail to develop a thriving, comprehensive student ministry. When *all* teenagers matter to ministry leaders,

problems begin to emerge from the “good enough” model of a service-driven student ministry.

Indifference to God's Redemptive Activity

There is no question that our fallen world is a dangerous place. As the apostle Paul suggests, we continue to live in a “crooked and perverse generation”—but not only does he exhort us to lives that are blameless and innocent, he also exhorts us to “shine as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:15 RSV). To shelter student ministry in a strategy of safety and protection is to fall short of God's intended purpose of redemption. The fallen world in which we live is the very object of God's love, and, as theologian William Dyrness writes, “God's commitment is a continuing personal activity that supports the created order.”³ God has never abandoned creation and remains committed to its redemption. As human beings created in God's image, we are partners with God in this mission of redemption.

The world is not absent of God's presence, and our investment in the worldly culture is theologically meaningful. Dyrness puts it this way: “Because of God's presence and action, our involvement in culture has real theological significance. We are called to reflect God's own commitment to the world.”⁴ Our reflection of God's commitment calls us to a ministry that touches the world beyond the safety of our faith community. “God's hands are already upon everything that our hands touch. His mind already sustains everything that our minds address. The world is not a place from which he is absent, however much it may grieve him. The work of God in Christ brings redemption into his creation-sustaining activity.”⁵

If student ministry solely protects adolescents from the secular world, then we are in danger of becoming theologically indifferent to God's redemptive purpose.⁶ Such indifference results in a hollow ministry marked by inward self-satisfaction, a ministry that is not fully immersed in God's story of redemption. We connect with God's story fully “by working alongside God in bringing people and the earth to the place where they reflect the divine glory.”⁷ When we find ourselves in God's story, we find ourselves fully engrossed in the world God created, filled with a passion to redeem that which is not yet reflecting God's glory.

Creation of an Alternative World

The culture of our world, thanks in part to technology, is so pervasive that the alternative world comprising Christian schools, churches,

and student ministries actually offers little, if any, protection from the dominant culture. Quiz any homeschooled teenagers on their knowledge of pop culture, and they will ace your test. No Christian environment automatically guarantees safety. Even separatists like the Amish struggle with the influences of the dominant culture that surrounds them. The Corinthians employed this strategy after Paul instructed them not to associate with sexually sinful people. Believing that Paul wanted them to disassociate from all sinful unbelievers, they abandoned their pagan neighbors. Paul corrects their actions concerning this earlier advice by explaining: "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world" (1 Cor. 5:9–10).

We are enmeshed in a fallen world, yet called to be in the world, but not of it. Before Paul admonished the Corinthians, Jesus taught this lesson through his intercessory prayer: "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (John 17:15–18).

Parents are often highly selective when it comes to the particular features of the world from which they want their children protected. They may desire to protect their children from drugs, sex, movies, or violent video games but have little concern for protecting them from consumerism or individualism, which may be equally detrimental to spiritual health.⁸

Short of becoming a cloistered nun or monk, everyone must eventually learn to navigate the world in which we live. Creating an alternative world for students throughout their teenage years only prolongs the inevitable; we offer parents and students a much greater gift when we teach adolescents to make wise decisions when they encounter all that the world has to offer them. When Esau sold his birthright to his brother Jacob for a bowl of stew, he was consumed with his immediate desire and ignored the long-term consequences of his actions (Gen. 25:19–34). Teaching students to invest in something that will last, even at the expense of instant gratification, is a gift that lasts a lifetime.

Walt Mueller has created a simple, robust process for analyzing the worldly culture in which we live. Mueller's *3(D) Guide to Making Responsible Media Choices* includes a three-step process for making wise decisions: (1) Discover what the culture is saying about an issue; (2) Discern how the message of the culture compares with God's truth

concerning the issue; and (3) Decide how to respond to the message of the culture in a manner that is honoring to God.⁹ Too often we view the world as black and white, resorting to the extremes of either fleeing the culture or embracing it. Student ministry leaders must *engage* the culture with wisdom and strength, teaching students to do the same, so that we all might become creators of culture.

Belief That “Those People” Threaten Us

When singer Susan Boyle stepped onto the stage of *Britain’s Got Talent*, the judges did not expect much.¹⁰ They knew “her type,” and they had seen it time and time again. Based on her appearance and mannerisms, the judges and the audience thought that this woman’s audition was going to be a waste of time. Then she began to sing, and the beauty of her voice amazed everyone in the auditorium. Rather than seeing her for what she could be, the audience had prejudged her according to preconceived stereotypes of how good singers look and act. Likewise, most adults prejudge teenagers they do not know based solely on an ingrained stereotype of adolescents. Because of this stereotype adults often feel threatened by and fearful of teenagers they do not know.

Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie speaks about the dangers of the “single story.” She grew up in a middle-class Nigerian family; her father was a professor and her mother was an administrator. At the age of nineteen, she left Nigeria to attend an American university. Her roommate was shocked that Adichie spoke English so well and was surprised to learn that English is the official language of Nigeria. When she asked to listen to some of Adichie’s tribal music, she was stunned when Adichie produced a tape of Mariah Carey. Adichie’s roommate possessed only a single story of the African continent and applied this singular mind-set to all Africans. Adichie reflects, “The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.”¹¹

Single stories of people are created when the same story is repeated over and over again. Eventually we come to believe that this single story is true of all the people we associate with the story. “The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity,” Adichie writes. “It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar.”¹² The story of the American teenager is often a single story. For most adults it is a story of confusion, bad behavior, poor decision making, and raging hormones.

Chap Clark argues that “most adults fear and in many cases are basically repulsed by what they see in the adolescent world.”¹³ One study revealed that seven in ten adults describe teenagers as rude, irresponsible, and wild.¹⁴ Adults have a single story of teenagers outside of their homes and outside of their churches. Their teenagers are the exception to the rule, and teenagers they do not know fall into the single story that frightens them.

Pete Ward writes, “The problem with church-based youth fellowship is that ‘unchurched’ young people can easily be seen as a significant threat.”¹⁵ We may fear that these teenagers will corrupt the lives of Christian teenagers, and yet they have the greatest need of hearing the transforming message of God’s grace. If the church takes on a model of student ministry that caters to the service of Christian parents who desire a safe place for their teenagers, then where will teenagers outside the church encounter the living God? In parachurch ministries, of course! Young Life, Youth for Christ, and countless parachurch student ministries continue to thrive in part because many churches have determined that a student ministry focused on discipleship is good enough for their congregation. The 20 percent of a student ministry known as discipleship will typically satisfy at least 80 percent of the student ministry stakeholders in a typical church.

Who will rise up and speak on behalf of those students who are far from God? Most often the parents of those students are not in the church. Student ministries that understand faith formation and create a context in which students are able to grow in their faith need not fear engaging unchurched students. As students share their faith with others, they grow in their walk with Christ. As a community of believers reaches out to those far from God, the community becomes a more faithful expression of the triune God.

When we understand our identity in Christ and the mission of the church, we no longer fear the messiness that accompanies our engagement with people outside the fellowship. In fact, we come to understand that without such messiness, our faithfulness to the gospel is hollow. Embracing others requires us to move, in faith, from a position of concern about how others might affect our Christian students to a position of embracing others as we view them as God created them to be.

Tony Campolo recounts an experience that makes this point quite sharply. While teaching sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, Campolo stirred a class discussion by asking students to consider how leaders of various world religions viewed the dehumanizing practice of prostitution. As the discussion became intense, Campolo asked, “What

do you suppose Jesus would have said to a prostitute?" One student responded, "Jesus never met a prostitute." "Yes, he did," Campolo responded. "I'll show you in my Bible where—" The confident student interrupted the professor. "You didn't hear me, Doctor. I said Jesus never met a prostitute." Not backing down, Campolo began searching his Bible for appropriate passages to bolster his point. Once again, the student insisted. "You're not listening to me, Doctor. Do you think that when he looked at Mary Magdalene he saw a prostitute? Do you think he saw whores when he looked at women like her? Doctor, listen to me! Jesus never met a prostitute!" Campolo fell silent. His theology had come under attack by a student who perhaps understood Jesus better than he did—a student who understood that "to be a Christian is to learn to see people as Christ sees them."¹⁶ We, too, must see adolescents who are far from God as Christ sees them and not allow ourselves to be threatened by their morality or behavior. We must have compassion on them in a way that honors the God we serve.

Conviction in "Passing" the Faith

Another problem with "good enough" student ministries is the belief that the essential role of parents and youth ministers is to pass on their experiences and knowledge to young people. There are numerous theological and sociological problems with this reasoning. Sociologically speaking, we know that the world is constantly changing. The experiences that adults had as teenagers are no longer the experiences of contemporary adolescents. I have experienced this with my own teenagers. Through studying adolescents generally and raising two of my own teenagers specifically, I am amazed at how different my adolescence was from that of teenagers today. One is not necessarily better than the other; they are simply different. We must recognize the social structures that teenagers inhabit today, and we must guide them in discovering their own identities rather than imposing our solutions from yesteryear. While knowledge can certainly be passed along, faith must be discovered.

We also must understand the theological constraints of passing on the faith. While the desire to pass faith from one generation to the next is good and right, such "passing" language can create the idea of a static God as a commodity to be consumed. This places the teenager in the position of a consumer of the faith, and parents and youth ministers in the position of distribution managers. Sharon Galgay Ketcham described the issue this way:

If a youth's role is only to receive faith, they are not being welcomed into a faith in which they are expected to participate and contribute. People are not empty vessels into which we pour knowledge about the faith and certainly not faith itself. Passing language ignores the agency of the receiver. Might the expectations of an adult who seeks to "pass faith" underestimate the need to engage with youth in conversation, dialogue, and exchange that will further shape mutual understanding and experience of God? At worst, passing language can degenerate to adults controlling a youth's knowledge and experience of faith, neglecting to invite youth to join with the community's faith.¹⁷

If we serve a living God and read God's living Word, then our lives and the lives of teenagers will encounter the living presence of God. How much better this is than a static faith in a stagnant God, passed down from one generation to the next.

We can find such a living faith only when we trust that God has not abandoned this world and that Christ is active in the world through the Holy Spirit. We must believe that God has equipped the church with the gifts of the Spirit to transform all manner of persons near and far from their Creator. We are not simply passing on the faith to teenagers; we are cultivating the faith of teenagers as we seek to merge their story with God's story. We are helping them embark on a lifelong journey of discovery through contribution to and participation in the faith community.¹⁸

The Philosophical Decision

One of the most important philosophical decisions that a church makes is whether their student ministry will be a service ministry to the families of the church with teenagers or a comprehensive ministry that moves beyond the church walls and into the community, reaching out to unchurched students. Failure to intentionally make this decision results in the default position of "good enough" ministries that serve the desires of parents with teenagers in the church.

I regularly receive calls from pastors searching to fill open student ministry positions with our students from Gordon College. Most often they are looking for graduating seniors or recent graduates to fill full-time positions, but occasionally a pastor will call looking to fill a part-time position. I am always curious about part-time positions and often ask the caller, "How many teenagers are there in your community?"

The response is always the same: "We only have about ten or twelve teenagers right now."

"Really! There are only a dozen teenagers in your local school district?" I'll reply.

"Oh no, there are only about a dozen teenagers in our church."

"Well, how many teenagers are in the town where your church is located?"

"I don't know," the person will say. "Hundreds, I suppose."

"Then why don't you hire a full-time youth minister?"

"Oh, we can't afford to do that."

I have never pushed the conversation into the budgeting arena, but I suspect that most churches willing to hire a half-time person *could* afford to hire a full-time person if creating a comprehensive student ministry were a real priority. Many churches never take the time to truly consider the importance of student ministry. They simply respond to the felt needs of families with teenagers in their church and, by default, create a service ministry.

Service Ministries

A service view of student ministry, deemed good enough for the stakeholders of the church, is not created in isolation. Rather, it evolves from a systemic model of the church, either by design or by default. Ask any church staff member to describe the typical member of his or her congregation, and the person will likely produce an image with great clarity. Without fail, the image will be of an adult of a certain age and will include a variety of metrics. Perhaps your church is predominantly made up of young, urban professionals, or with middle-income couples without children, or with middle-aged professionals with families, or with retired persons. No matter how the typical member of a church is described, it will always be the description of an adult.

Often church planters go to great lengths to describe their "target audience" in the hope that they can create a church ethos that will be attractive to the defined target.¹⁹ Once again, this is always an adult. It may be a young adult, a professional adult, or an urban adult, but it is always an adult. Churches are created and designed by adults and for adults! Once members of a local church establish—often subconsciously—a normative understanding of the typical church member, they design ministries to serve the typical church member. Some congregations go to great lengths to become "full-service" churches that meet every need of their membership profile. If this profile includes families with young children, there will surely be a children's ministry. This is not because the church is passionate about ministering to children; children are not

the profile of a typical member. Rather, care for children is an expressed need of the typical adult member of the church.

This view sits in stark contrast to an organization such as Child Evangelism Fellowship, whose target audience is children. The same is true for organizations such as Young Life or Youth for Christ, which center on ministry with teenagers. For these organizations, ministry with children or teenagers is not a byproduct of ministry with adults. Ministry with children or teenagers is the essential mission of the organization.

When families with teenagers populate the church, congregations will always put forth some effort to meet the needs of these parents by providing programs for teenagers. The concern here is not for teenagers as much as it is for the parents of teenagers. It is not uncommon to hear church-growth gurus suggest that if you want your church to grow, you need to have excellent ministries for children and teenagers, because that is what attracts families. The emphasis is primarily to meet the felt needs of adults, by providing programs for children and teenagers. This is very different than making the genuine needs of children and teenagers primary. You can test this theory by attending a new members' class at your church. Typically at the first meeting, the class leader will ask participants to share what attracted them to the church. Some will declare the preaching, or the denomination, or the location. But if you listen to the reasons given by those who have children, you will hear that their number-one reason is often the reputation of, or their experience with, the ministries for children or teenagers.

Once this becomes the mindset of a church, a student ministry that serves the desires of parents quickly becomes good enough. As long as most parents are happy with the student ministry, the ministry is declared excellent, and a trickle of growth (often transfer growth) may occur through parents telling other parents how great the student ministry is at their church.

If something goes awry and parents are no longer satisfied with the student ministry, the ministry is declared a failure. Most often parents become dissatisfied for one of three reasons. First, if their children don't like the ministry for some reason, they will either begin refusing to attend, or they will attend the programs begrudgingly and only at their parents' insistence. This does not make for happy parents. Second, while their children might enjoy participating in the student ministry programs, parents may feel that the ministry is not contributing to their children's spiritual formation. Parents often frame this concern by requesting more "depth" of teaching in the ministry, or more formal discipleship programs,

or youth leaders who establish stronger mentoring relationships with the teenagers.

Finally, parents can become dissatisfied with the student ministry when they perceive that it is no longer a safe place for their children. Safety may be construed either physically or spiritually. Parents might decide that the chaos they observe at a middle school meeting is out of control and that kids are not physically safe. If too many students return from a retreat with physical injuries from playing football, ultimate Frisbee, or red rover, parents may also question the physical safety of the ministry. Spiritually, parents will declare a ministry unsafe when they feel that participating in the ministry is weakening their child's faith. This often occurs when parents notice their teenager raising doubts or hard faith questions. This may also happen when parents feel that the ministry is exposing their child to negative influences. Most often this happens when the ministry strives to reach out to students beyond the church walls. When unchurched students begin to join the ministry, bringing with them their doubts, foul language, and immoral habits, Christian parents raise concerns that their child may be influenced negatively. When a teenager comes home from a conservative church's youth meeting and tells her mother that she spent most of the night listening to a new girl talk about why she is a lesbian, there is no doubt that the youth minister will be receiving a phone call from a parent concerned about the influence the ministry is having on her daughter.

This view of student ministry is often supported by the idea that we are to pass on the faith from one generation to the next. This is understood as a primary duty of parents in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 6, which contains the oft-quoted Shema, begins with a description of God's provision for the faith formation of children.

These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get

up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (6:1–9)

Elders were also expected to impart the faith to children, as described in Deuteronomy: “Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you” (32:7). Fathers and elders were expected to explain the ways of the Lord to children. When these expectations were not met, the next generation would fail to embrace the faith, as described in Judges: “After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals” (2:10–11). So in the church today we boldly declare the words of the wisdom of the Proverb: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (22:6 RSV).

All of this teaching is given to those who were faithful followers of the Lord, and it is good teaching for us to continue giving Christian parents. It is without question the responsibility of Christian parents to raise their children in the faith, and they should be able to count on the community of faith to help them do so. At best, parents who take seriously the responsibility of raising their children in the faith look to the church for help in accomplishing this high calling. The church, in turn, often provides specialized ministries for children and teenagers in an effort to come alongside parents in this quest. At worst, parents view the church as responsible for raising their children in the faith and expect these ministries to accomplish the faith formation task for them.

Whether parents and student ministries work together or parents delegate the task of faith development to student ministries, the driving force of student ministries becomes the felt needs and desires of Christian parents for the faith formation of their teenagers. Coming alongside parents is *a* significant mission of student ministry, but it is only one aspect of a comprehensive student ministry. Nevertheless, many churches have determined, intentionally or by default, that providing this service to Christian families is good enough for their student ministries.

Comprehensive Ministries

Serving the teenagers of the church and their families has been the common view of church-based student ministry for many years. Relatively few churches have taken a comprehensive approach that cares

for the sheep within the flock while simultaneously reaching out to the young people of the community. To embrace this approach requires a great deal of intentionality on the part of the entire church leadership. A comprehensive view of student ministry is perhaps best described by Doug Fields in *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry*.²⁰ Fields' book was published three years after Rick Warren, who was then Fields' senior pastor, published *The Purpose Driven Church*. By that time, many youth ministers were serving in churches that had embraced the purpose-driven values described by Warren.²¹

The values of a comprehensive ministry are most often based on the brief description of the early church in Acts 2:42–47.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

This description of the early church is supported by a trilogy of Jesus' teachings, which are often labeled the Great Commandment, the Great Commission, and what I refer to as the Great Charge.

THE GREAT COMMANDMENT

Jesus first commands us to love God and neighbor. "‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matt. 22:37–40).

All of our ministry may be derived from this Great Commandment. To love God is to know God in all aspects of life. We often segregate our love for God into areas of knowledge and experience, as if one can exist without the other. Many speak of an intellectual knowing of God through the life of the mind, while others declare their love of God through their experience. In Hebrew the word *yada*, "to know," captures both knowledge and experience. For the Hebrews, to know about God was to experience God, and to experience God was to know God. It would have been unimaginable to speak of knowing God without experiencing God personally. Marvin Wilson writes,

Knowledge and wisdom are related concepts; both are rooted in God, and both share in the application of learning to life. In the Western world knowledge has often been limited in definition, confined to abstract concepts or theoretical principles. But in Hebrew thought to “know” something was to experience it, rather than merely to intellectualize it. To “know” someone was to share an intimate personal relationship with that one. Thus the Hebrew verb *yada*, “to know,” means to encounter, experience, and share in an intimate way. . . . The idea of knowledge thus embraced the whole human personality. A grasp of so much information was not enough; it also implied a response in the practical domain of life, in behavior and morals. . . . Thus, social action and good character result from a right relationship with God through his revelation. To “know” God is to walk faithfully in his ways and to live out the terms of his covenant. It included both the internalizing of truth and its outworking in the affairs of life. In short, for the Hebrew, to “know” was to “do”. . . . It included down-to-earth activity or personal know-how applied to various realms and experiences of life.²²

When we reflect on the meaning of loving God with all of our hearts, souls, and minds, we dare not give in to the temptation of deconstructionism, as though we can segregate our love of God into component parts of heart, soul, and mind.

“Knowing God” has nothing to do with abstract, intellectual knowledge about God but, in Scripture, is connected to God’s acts of self-revelation (Schmitz, *NIDNTT* 2:395). Knowing God’s acts in history and God’s promises to act in the future leads one to honor God as the one true God (Rom. 1:21) and to enter into a proper relationship with God based on trust. The problem for the “wise” is that God’s acts in history are so unexpected and so enigmatic that they fail to recognize them as God’s acts. It may seem as if God deliberately blinds them so that they cannot see (Isa. 29:9–10). But only those who admit that they see through a glass darkly and are open to God’s revelation can truly know God and receive God’s offer of salvation.²³

When the lawyer in Luke 10 asks Jesus to define who his neighbors are, Jesus turns the man’s question on its head with the story of the Good Samaritan. Rather than describing others as neighbors, Jesus describes what it means to be a neighbor to others. Of course, by showing mercy to the man who was beaten and left for dead, the outcast Samaritan turns out to be the model neighbor. We typically understand the person in need to be a neighbor that we should not ignore, but Robert McAfee Brown suggests that we come up short when we simply conclude that our neighbor is anyone we meet along life’s journey who is in need.

Brown further argues that this view minimizes the drama and sacrifice of the Samaritan's encounter with the beaten man lying on the side of the road. The Samaritan does not simply give aid to a person he happens upon in his travels. Rather, he crosses over into another culture with great intentionality, engages the man's needs, and goes out of his way to ensure the man's extended care through the innkeeper's help. "The neighbor was not the wounded man, 'the neighbor was the Samaritan who *approached* the wounded man and *made him his neighbor*'. . . . Being a neighbor makes the one who is approached into a neighbor also. The neighbor is not the one whom I find in my path but rather the one in whose path I place myself, the one whom I approach and actively seek."²⁴ The Samaritan understands the imperative of the Great Commandment, extending himself as a neighbor to someone in need outside of his ethnic culture. Likewise, comprehensive ministry calls us to extend ourselves to students in need beyond the walls of the church.

THE GREAT COMMISSION

Having come to understand the meaning of loving God and neighbor, the disciples meet Jesus in Galilee, shortly after his resurrection, and he commissions them. "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:19–20).

In this Great Commission, Jesus commands his disciples to make more disciples through baptizing people and teaching them all that he had taught them. Making disciples begins with evangelism. Youth Specialties co-founder Mike Yaconelli suggests that youth ministers are not social workers, or counselors, or social change agents, or family therapists, or family arbitrators, or stepparents, or activities coordinators, or recreation directors, or programmers, or educators. While youth ministers certainly help kids relate to their families, obtain social services, counsel, program, and educate, student ministry is primarily missional in nature. The purpose of student ministry, according to Yaconelli, is simply this: "Youth ministry is about bringing kids into the presence of Jesus Christ."²⁵ And which students are we to bring into the presence of Christ? Students who are *outside* the presence of Christ. Making disciples is about reaching lost people and ushering them into the fellowship of believers—that is, the church.²⁶

THE GREAT CHARGE

After appearing to the disciples for forty days and teaching them about the true meaning of the kingdom, Jesus declares his Great Charge to

them in Jerusalem, prior to his ascension. “Then they gathered around him and asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them: ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’” (Acts 1:6–8).

This final charge to the disciples echoes the Great Commission while offering a distinct message.²⁷ In the Great Commission, Jesus empowers the disciples to go forth and make disciples using everything he has taught them. In Acts 1:8, Jesus charges the disciples to be his witnesses. This holds a twofold meaning: eyewitness and confessing witness. As eyewitnesses, the disciples bear witness to the factual events of Jesus’ life. But Jesus does not merely instruct them to be faithful historians: he charges them to proclaim the significance of his life, death, and resurrection to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. They are charged with bearing witness to both the events of Jesus’ life and the consequence of the incarnation. While we cannot serve as eyewitnesses to the life of Christ, we are called to serve as confessing witnesses who have grasped, in faith, the significance of Jesus.²⁸

From these passages, we understand the climate of the early church as described in Acts 2 and catch a vision of the church that we are to become.

- The community of faith loves God.
- The community of faith reaches out to and loves neighbors.
- The community of faith makes disciples of those far from God, baptizing and teaching.
- The community of faith bears witness to Jesus Christ, near and far.

This is the framework of a comprehensive ministry. The core values of worship, outreach, ministry, faith formation, and community are all represented in Christ’s directives to his followers.

Components of a Comprehensive Ministry

Comprehensive ministry has been described as having an assortment of components, ranging from as few as three to as many as eight. Today the most popular model seems to be that of Warren and Fields,²⁹ who define five components of a comprehensive ministry: *worship, discipleship,*

evangelism, fellowship, and ministry. Various authors have written about these components, and many churches have adopted them, using differing terminology. *Discipleship* may be described as *spiritual formation, Christian formation, or faith formation.* Each term for discipleship can be differentiated when exploring the theology of sanctification, but for our purposes they can serve synonymously. *Evangelism* is often considered tantamount to *outreach, fellowship* is often described as *community,* and *ministry* is often referred to as *service.* Some churches reduce these five to three or four, by combining evangelism and ministry into one component of *outreach* or by understanding *fellowship* as something that happens organically. One danger with this reduction is that folding evangelism and ministry into outreach typically results in the loss of an evangelistic edge to the outreach component. In the same way, when the term *outreach* is used for evangelism, it is important to maintain *ministry, or service,* as another distinct component. Finally, when *fellowship* is not an explicit core value, the importance of connecting and contributing to the community can be lost, and people quickly become mere consumers of the community.

Malan Nel describes the eight components of a comprehensive student ministry as: *preaching, worship, pastoral care, management and administration, teaching, fellowship, deeds of mercy, and witnessing.*³⁰ In reference to Warren's model, Nel attains eight components by making *preaching* distinct from *worship,* dividing *ministry* into *pastoral care* and *deeds of mercy,* and adding *management and administration.* *Teaching* is comparable to Warren's *discipleship,* and *witnessing* is Nel's term for *evangelism.*

After visiting a hundred churches and surveying nearly two thousand Christian adults, Steve Macchia concluded that healthy churches share at least ten characteristics.³¹ Interestingly, these ten characteristics fall directly in line with the five components that Warren describes. Healthy churches, Macchia found, exhibit (1) God's empowering presence, and (2) God-exalting worship, both attributes of Warren's tenet of *worship.* Healthy churches are composed of people (3) learning and growing in community, with an emphasis on (4) spiritual disciplines, certainly hallmarks of *discipleship.* Healthy churches are committed to (5) loving and caring relationships, as well as (6) networking with the body of Christ, both aspects of *fellowship.* Healthy churches intentionally focus on (7) servant leadership development and (8) wise administration and accountability, two of the pillars of *ministry.* Finally, healthy churches possess (9) an outward focus and are marked by faithful (10) stewardship and generosity, both essential to *outreach.*

While Nel presents a strong theoretical argument for his eight components, and Macchia offers keen insights to the core values of a healthy church, both present significant challenges for implementation in ministry given the amount of pragmatic overlap. Reducing Warren's five components to four or three may result in a less-than-comprehensive ministry, while expanding the components of a comprehensive ministry may become overwhelming and confusing. Yet in the proper context Nel, Macchia, and others provide helpful insights into the five components described by Warren and Fields. These five components provide enough breadth to be truly considered comprehensive while maintaining a manageable strategy for implementation.³²

Aligning Student Ministry and the Church

Even though scores of youth ministers have embraced the comprehensive approach described above, many have struggled to implement a fully functioning comprehensive ministry. I remember well the year that Fields' book was released, because my phone kept ringing with distraught youth ministers on the other end. "Have you read Fields' book?" they would ask.

"Yes, I have."

"So, what do you think of it?"

"I think it's great—wish I'd written it!"

"Me too, but I just can't get the model to work."

I would talk them through all the aspects of their ministry, as if I were working for Purpose Driven Tech Support, and then wish them well on their endeavors, all without feeling confident that I had been very helpful. After about three or four conversations, I finally asked one youth minister a question, almost by accident, that unlocked my thinking significantly. "Are you serving in a purpose-driven church?" I asked.

"Um, no, not really."

"Has your pastor read Rick Warren's book?"

"Yes, he has and frankly he didn't like it that much."

And therein lies the problem. From that point on, I began every conversation with a question about the senior pastor's view on the purpose-driven church model. Not surprisingly, there was a direct correlation between the values of the church and the values of the student ministry. For better or worse student ministry will almost always reflect the values of the church at large.

When youth ministers were not serving in purpose-driven churches, the problem areas of the student ministry were almost always areas that the church in general did not value. As Todd Erickson has said, “Student ministry needs to be aligned with the church. The church is not just a feeding trough for student ministry. We are all in the same ministry together.”³³ The area of greatest contention was almost always evangelism; sometimes, to a lesser degree, worship; and occasionally ministry. The discipleship and fellowship components of a comprehensive ministry were never a problem. In fact, churches always wanted more discipleship and fellowship in the student ministry. Why? Because Christian parents desperately wanted *their* teenagers to be connected and “disciplined.” Majoring in two of the five components described in Fields’ model was good enough for many churches, but youth ministers wanted more. They wanted a God-honoring ministry that nurtured students within the broad community of the church, reached out to students beyond the walls of the church, and engaged students in meaningful acts of service.

When youth ministers serve in purpose-driven churches, it is relatively easy to troubleshoot the issues in their purpose-driven student ministries. Even some youth ministers serving in churches that embrace a comprehensive model, however, struggle to develop a comprehensive student ministry. While the church may value outreach and strive to reach people beyond the walls of the church, adults often remain the target audience. In terms of commitment and resources, outreach in student ministry is not always supported by the church leadership. Even in a seeker-driven church, it is the Christian parents of teenagers who are making their needs known, not the unchurched parents of unchurched teenagers—they are simply not present. Hence, in a church that is highly committed to evangelism, an important strategic question must be raised. Will the church be content to simply receive new teenagers into the student ministry as a byproduct of reaching out to adults? Or will the church also strive to reach out directly to teenagers in the local community through the student ministry (and perhaps draw in new parents as a result of reaching teenagers)? In the first scenario, student ministries become rather passive in the area of outreach and are once again meeting the needs of parents. In the second scenario, student ministries are actively striving to connect directly with students outside the church.

Making a conscious, prayerful, thoughtful decision about the approach of a student ministry is one of the most important decisions a church leadership team can make. Neither the youth minister nor the student ministry leadership team should ever make this decision alone. This decision must be owned, embraced, and supported by the entire leadership

of the church, because it holds significant implications for the kind of person needed to serve as youth minister, the type of volunteers to be recruited, the kind of volunteer training that is necessary, and the kinds of programs needed to achieve the goals of the student ministry. Everything in student ministry rides on this decision. When a church chooses the service mode of student ministry, the charge is to maintain a ministry that meets the needs of the parents of teenagers. When a church chooses a comprehensive mode, student ministry thrives and the church is filled with life and vitality. Students become engaged in the whole life of the church, students far from God are attracted to a community of people who are passionate about their faith, and the entire congregation is blessed with the contributions of adolescents. Student ministry is not simply an arm of Christian education. Student ministry is ministry and embraces all aspects of ministry. Kenda Creasy Dean describes student ministry in this manner:

What makes youth ministry distinctive is not its form, but its flock. Ministry with young people is, after all, *ministry*—not so different from ministry with anybody else. Yet because young people demand that the church address them in their particularity (in other words, from the perspective of their specific cultural and developmental experiences as adolescents), youth ministry serves as a laboratory where we can learn to contextualize ministry. When we walk alongside young people as Christ's representatives, we become incarnational witnesses, people who must use our own lives to "put wheels on the gospel" for the flock at hand.³⁴

When we choose to view student ministry as simply an arm of Christian education—that is, the nurturing of students growing up in the church—then we fail to fully engage in the ministry of the gospel within the particular context to which we have been called.

Robert Frost's classic poem "The Road Not Taken" provides a clear metaphor for this important philosophical decision concerning student ministry.

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I would
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;

Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.³⁵

While the two roads of student ministry may look similar at the outset, they are truly very different paths. Frost desired to travel both if he could. In student ministry, choosing a comprehensive approach actually provides the opportunity to do just that. There is nothing on the “good enough” road that is not included on the comprehensive road, but the “good enough” road is incomplete, unfinished, and left wanting. Like Frost, the comprehensive road is less traveled by church leadership and requires a greater investment, but this courageous decision will lead to such a thriving ministry that the desire to return to the first road will be short lived. Thankfully, there are switchback trails for those already on the road of “good enough” to make their way to the road of comprehensive student ministry at any moment. Choosing that road will make all the difference in the vitality of student ministry and the vibrancy of the local church.

Students Thrive in Ministries with Purpose

One of the most deplorable atrocities of World War II occurred in a prison camp where the inmates were forced to perform meaningless work. One day they would move a massive pile of garbage from one side of the camp to the other. The next day they would be ordered to move the pile of garbage back to its original location. Day after day, this meaningless work—relocating the garbage pile from one side of the camp to the other—continued. Eventually the mindless task began to take a toll on the prisoners. One day a prisoner began crying uncontrollably and had to be removed from the group. Another man began screaming until he was beaten into silence. Another man who had served in the prison

for three years ran from his garbage-pile duty toward the electric fence surrounding the encampment. Ignoring the warnings to stop, he hurled himself onto the fence and was instantly electrocuted. As the guards showed callous indifference to the plight of the prisoners performing the mind-numbing shifting of the garbage, more men went insane. The inmates did not know that they were part of a Nazi experiment on mental health designed to determine the human capacity for meaningless activity. Through this experiment, the Nazis determined that a life devoid of purpose can result in insanity and suicide.³⁶

Clearly, we understand that purpose is a pivotal factor in determining the quality of human life. This is no less true in student ministry. The quality of a student ministry is strongly correlated to its purpose. When we are foggy concerning the purpose of ministry, we accomplish little that honors God.

I remember one incident at Boston's Logan Airport with great clarity. I was heading to Long Island, New York, for a meeting. When I approached the ticket counter with my reservation in hand, the ticket agent informed me that I was far too early to check in for my flight. Knowing that I was running late, I asked, bewildered, "How can it be too early to check in for an 8:00 a.m. flight?" She pointed out that my flight was departing twelve hours later, at 8:00 p.m. I had mistakenly booked the wrong flight!

Now there was nothing wrong with my flight. It included a fine aircraft and was headed to the right destination, but it was leaving too late. Other flights on the airline departed at 8:00 a.m., but they were headed to the wrong destinations. I did not need a good aircraft that was heading to a random location at any old time; I needed a good airplane that was headed to New York in time for my meeting.

Likewise, our ministry vehicles must be headed in the right direction at the right time. Flying around from one ministry activity to another week after week, month after month, year after year, with no purpose in mind quickly becomes meaningless and tiresome. When we are guided by clarity of purpose, however, we are infused with energy that transcends the fatigue of the toil, and ministries thrive as lives are transformed.

Remember the wisdom that the Cheshire cat imparts to Alice when she asks which way she should go? "'That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,' said the cat. 'I don't much care where—' said Alice. 'Then it doesn't matter which way you go,' said the cat."³⁷ When we ignore the purposes set forth for ministry, we are apt to become disobedient to God by omission. We may be on a great journey, but if it is not a journey aligned with God's purposes, the journey is worthless.

Start with the End in Mind

When we have the opportunity to disciple teenagers, we start with the end in mind. What do we hope this student's faith will look like fifty years from now? We also train students to be a winsome witness on their school campus. When this happens, they are no longer bored by church or student ministry activities. They are in training . . . knowing they might be held accountable for this training tomorrow at school. This changes everything.

Kendra and Nathaniel Williams, Youth for Christ,
Auburn, California

The purpose of life, in God's view, is not differentiated by age. Men and women, young and old, are all called to fulfill the Great Commission. Sometimes we act as if Matthew 28 begins: "When you become an adult, go and make disciples," or "When you become a deacon, or elder, or pastor, go and make disciples." Yet there is no age distinction when it comes to loving God, loving neighbor, or making disciples. The purposes of student ministry are the same as the purposes of the church. "Christian young people cannot choose what aspect of the Great Commission they will or will not obey," write Lee Vukich and Steve Vandegriff. "Hence we must structure our ministry in such a way so that the opportunity to obey each aspect of the Great Commission is given."³⁸ The same can certainly be said for the Great Commandment.

The construction industry is held accountable for following strict building codes, and for good reason. If a builder decides to cut corners on the materials necessary to support the structure, disaster can occur. So it happened once with a simple home that was constructed with half the number of wall studs necessary. Rather than building walls with vertical studs every sixteen inches, the builder constructed walls with studs every thirty-two inches or so in order to save money. The home looked great when it was finished, but once winter rolled around and the snow piled up on the roof, the walls began to buckle. Eventually the house simply collapsed, as the walls could not support the weight of the snow-packed roof.

When we design a ministry solely around the two studs of nurturing and fellowship, we fail to provide students with the opportunity to engage in ministry, outreach, and worship, which are essential to God's purpose for all Christians—not just adults—and we fail to be faithful to that which God has called us. While the students may look great for a

time, eventually the pressures of the world pile up. Students who have not learned to engage in ministry, outreach, and worship collapse under the pressure, and their student ministry comes under fire for not preparing them for a life of meaningful purpose.

Clarity of purpose brings vitality to student ministry and provides a structural support upon which student ministries thrive. Only through a comprehensive approach to student ministry will we fulfill our God-given mandate and provide contexts filled with joy, purpose, meaning, and adventure in which teenagers can discover and engage God's story. When that happens, all teenagers matter, lives are transformed, the whole church is engaged, and student ministry thrives.

Embracing Outreach

In February 1812, Adoniram Judson and a small group of passionate believers set sail from Salem, Massachusetts, to India, becoming the first group of American Christian missionaries. For over two hundred years, American Christians have been traveling overseas to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. More missionaries have traveled the globe from the United States than any other country. In 2010 there were an estimated 400,000 global missionaries, and 127,000 of them were sent from the United States. Brazil sent the second-most missionaries that year, with 32,400.³⁹

Ironically, the country that has sent the greatest number of missionaries around the world has failed to spread the gospel among its own people. In the American Religious Identification Survey, the number of people who identified themselves as having no religious affiliation nearly doubled from 1990 (8 percent) to 2008 (15 percent).⁴⁰ This increase was found in every single state across the country, making it a national trend. It may be difficult to imagine America, a historic exporter of missionaries, as a mission field, but we are truly in need of a missionary-type effort, especially among teenagers. In his blog *Church and Culture*, James Emery White explores three essentials of being a missionary: *learn the language, become sensitized to the culture, and translate the gospel*.⁴¹

Learn the Language

Every missionary understands the importance of communication. A language barrier is a foundational obstacle that must be overcome, and

missionaries strive to learn the language of the people they are trying to reach. Learning the language of a people group is more than simply learning words; it is learning how to converse with people in a manner that can engage thoughts, feelings, hopes, and dreams. While most U.S. teenagers speak English, they have their own tribal dialects of words, sounds, and symbols, all of which are constantly changing.

I recently attended an awards ceremony of the state high school theater guild, where teenagers were being honored for their skill and creativity as actors, musicians, writers, and designers. At one point, a prominent adult began to describe an award that required contestants to submit a collection of works. Without considering the language of his adolescent audience, he said, "This award is based upon the actor's entire package." The young audience erupted with laughter at what they heard as a sexual innuendo. (If you don't get it, ask a teenager.) If adults desire to engage teenagers in meaningful ways, they must learn the language of adolescents.

Become Sensitized to the Culture

Missionaries understand that to function well in a foreign land, they must become such good students of the culture that they are sensitized to every nuance they encounter. Culture exists both externally and internally. We can describe the culture of the world in which we live while being sensitive to the culture that lives in our own being. Everything is cultural: we are affected by culture, and we affect culture. "Culture is the comprehensive, penetrating context that encompasses our life and thought, art and speech, entertainment and sensibility, values and faith," writes White.⁴² Outreach occurs in this context, and while we would never want to "cave to the culture," we must be willing to make accommodations for the context in which we are ministering.

When visiting baseball teams come to Boston for a game with the Red Sox, they find themselves in historic Fenway Park, which is more than one hundred years old. Even with modern renovations, the park still has many quirky aspects, most notable among them the left field wall known as the Green Monster. A visiting left fielder who does not make accommodation to the rather short 310-foot left-field line and the rather tall 37-foot left-field wall will be in for a very long day of baseball. Major league outfielders rarely have to field balls ricocheting off the outfield wall—but if you play left field at Fenway, it becomes routine.

Adjusting to the context of one's surroundings in ministry is no less important. Ministry always occurs in a specific context, and becoming

sensitive to the adolescent context is essential for reaching out to teenagers.

Translate the Gospel

Missionaries translate the gospel to provide people with a clear understanding of God's message. This is not about transforming the gospel into something that was never intended by the biblical authors. Those committed to outreach must "translate the gospel so that it can be heard, understood, and appropriated."⁴³ While the gospel must always be translated for a unique context, it should never be transformed. Every generation creates a unique cultural context, and reaching out to teenagers requires that adults faithfully and effectively translate the gospel for an emerging culture. This is a delicate and sensitive task that requires a keen understanding of the author's words in the original context, and the wisdom to translate that meaning into the modern context of adolescent life.

Over the last two hundred years, American missionaries have influenced the world with the message of the gospel by traveling great distances to engage people in distant lands. Today many young people live in a foreign culture. Understanding local adolescents as a mission field and engaging them with the three essential tasks of missionaries are foundational to student ministry outreach.

Comprehensive Congregations

Second Presbyterian Church

The Second Presbyterian Church in Memphis, Tennessee, has embraced a comprehensive approach to student ministry. Todd Erickson and his ministry team have received extraordinary support from the church leadership at Second Presbyterian Church to create a comprehensive ministry through which God is transforming adolescents throughout the city of Memphis. Their emphasis is leading students in growing relationships with Christ. When Erickson speaks of "students," he is not simply referring to the teenagers in the church. He is talking about teenagers throughout the community in which his church is located. When he speaks of "growth," he refers to a journey that begins when students encounter Christ for the first time. "We want to meet students where they are. We didn't have to clean ourselves up before Jesus accepted us. He accepted us where he found us, but he also didn't leave us there."⁴⁴

The student ministries of Second Presbyterian Church are finding students all across the city of Memphis, accepting them as they are, and walking with them on the journey of faith. Relationships are critical to their ministry, as the faith journey is personal, communal, and intimate. While programs are part of the ministry, they primarily serve as environments to stimulate authentic relationships marked by love, compassion, and perseverance. Erickson and his team see themselves as both coming alongside parents in their God-given role of raising their children in the faith *and* reaching out to the teenagers beyond the confines of the church. This church is no one-eared Mickey Mouse, in which the small “ear” of student ministry sits off to the side of the “head” of the congregation, tangential and unrelated to the rest of the church.⁴⁵ Growing in a relationship with Christ includes growing in relationship with the community of Christ—that is, the church. To this end, teenagers are highly valued as contributing members of Second Presbyterian Church.

The Falls Church (Anglican)

Another example of comprehensive student ministry can be found just outside the nation’s capital in Falls Church, Virginia. Jim Byrne has consistently built comprehensive student ministries in each church he has served, and The Falls Church (Anglican) community has a long history of making student ministry a priority in their church. Like Second Presbyterian in Memphis, Byrne and his team at The Falls Church have been highly supported by the leadership of the church. His senior pastor communicates, with clarity and conviction, a biblical view of ministry centered on the Great Commission. This provides a platform for the student ministries to do the same, with the full support of a senior pastor who truly believes the gospel message is for all people—including teenagers! Byrne has felt this support not only from his pastors but also from the elders and other senior leadership in the churches he has served.

This unwavering support has allowed Byrne to create what he believes is the key to a faithful and effective student ministry: a committed team of adult leaders that he calls the “youth family.” This is a group of paid and volunteer leaders who truly act as a family, gathering weekly for food, fellowship, worship, teaching, and planning. Each year, the youth family takes a retreat just for themselves, without the teenagers. The youth family is not just a group of leaders. It is an authentic community of people who love and care for one another, genuinely feel ownership of the ministry, and invest in authentic relationships with the teenagers of the church and teenagers outside the church from all over the

Falls Church community. Byrne's high level of investment in leaders and leadership development translates into a group of people through whom God works in the lives of teenagers. The ministry of this group is truly greater than the sum of their talents, because they are a family supported and energized by one another.

Both Erickson and Byrne serve in communities that believe the gospel is to be proclaimed to all people—including teenagers outside the church walls who are far from God. Having the resources necessary to be comprehensive ministries, they are able to approach the adolescent population of their communities as a fertile mission field. Arming their adult and student leaders with a missiological theology of engaging people in their own context, they joyfully get to know students in their adolescent environments. Some of the adult leaders connect with students at their schools by volunteering to serve as coaches for varsity, junior varsity, or intramural activities. Others serve in the schools by helping with annual musical or drama productions. Students are taught the importance of peer-to-peer ministry as a commitment to the world around them. In this manner, it becomes natural for students to invite students to ministry events, share their testimony with friends, and care about those students they encounter every day with a high level of authenticity. As leaders are in direct contact with new students, and committed students invite friends to youth meetings, breakfast gatherings, or retreats, new students are constantly entering their ministries. In the final analysis, Byrne says that it is about creating a culture in which "leaders care more about students than programs and are committed to the genuine sharing of life stories."⁴⁶

Discussion Questions for Student Ministry Leaders

1. What do you believe is the purpose of student ministry? If you were to make an honest assessment of the current student ministry of your church, would you say it reflects the "good enough" principle? Why or why not? If so, what is the driving force behind the "good enough" principle? How do you think church leaders, parents, and volunteers would answer this question?
2. After reading this chapter, what inspires you in your pursuit of a comprehensive student ministry? What would be challenging about such a pursuit?
3. Which of the five components of a comprehensive student ministry—outreach, discipleship, community, worship, and ministry—are

- areas of strength in student ministry at your church? Which components are areas of growth? Why?
4. What would be different about the student ministry if you were to either begin or strengthen a comprehensive student ministry?
 5. Do you know the demographics in your area? How many teenagers? How many teenagers go to church? How many teenagers are in foster care? How many teenagers are in group homes or transitional housing?
 6. To what student populations do you feel called to reach out, and how will you do that?
 7. How can you train your students to be missionaries on their school campuses? (Youth for Christ's "3 Story Evangelism" is a great resource for such training: see www.3story.org.)

Discussion Questions for Church Leaders

1. What does the church believe is the purpose of student ministry? If you were to make an honest assessment of the current student ministry of your church, would you say it reflects the "good enough" principle? Why or why not? If so, what is the driving force behind the "good enough" principle? How would the youth leader, volunteers, and former parents and students of the student ministry answer this question?
2. Does the church leadership embrace a vision for a service ministry to the existing teenagers of the church, or do you desire a more comprehensive approach to student ministry? What are the barriers to becoming more comprehensive (e.g., resources, desire of parents, bandwidth of the student ministry leader, vision of the pastor)? What is the effect of remaining simply a service ministry to the existing youth of the church?
3. Which of the five components of a comprehensive student ministry—outreach, discipleship, community, worship, and ministry—are areas of strength in the overall church? Which ones are areas of growth? How do these answers compare to the strength and growth areas of the student ministry?
4. What might be different about the church if you were to develop or strengthen a comprehensive model of student ministry? What would be different about student ministry? What type of support would be needed for the youth minister?

5. The Institute of Educational Sciences reports that 80 percent of public school students participate in some type of extracurricular activity, and the majority of parents are transporting and participating in these activities at some level.⁴⁷ How can we train parents to be “missionaries” on their students’ campuses?
6. If student ministry understands the teenage population as a mission field, where it is necessary to learn a language and culture and to translate the gospel to that culture, what does it look like for the church to support and develop a missional approach to student ministry?
7. How might the student ministries of the church partner with parachurch student ministries in the community?