



## Special Research Report: The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry “The Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry”

**I**n the past ten years there have been a number of excellent studies on the religious beliefs, practices, and attitudes of adolescents. Unique among these research projects is the “Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry” (EYM), funded by the Lilly Endowment. The EYM Project focused on identifying congregations that consistently establish faith as a vital factor in the lives of their youth and discovering what accounts for their effective approaches to ministry. Seven denominations were involved in the study: Assemblies of God, Evangelical Covenant Church, , Lutheran (ELCA), Presbyterian Church USA, Roman Catholic, Southern Baptist, and United Methodist. Dr. Roland Martinson of Luther Seminar was the project director.

Through quantitative research (surveys of youth, parents, adult youth ministry leaders, and church staff in 131 congregations selected because they nurture youth of vital faith) and qualitative research (on-site, in-depth interviews in 21 congregations) the study uncovered important findings that affirm the best in congregational youth ministry and provide direction for enhancing and expanding ministry with youth.

The survey results revealed that the 131 congregations selected for study were in fact nurturing youth of vital faith. Comparisons between these congregations and those of previous studies on 86 aspects of faith, congregational life, and youth ministry show that the congregations in the study scored significantly higher on 65 of those measures. The study identified 34 characteristics of maturing Christian youth based on prior research studies. Using these characteristics, the self-reports of young people (surveys) show significantly higher scores than those of youth participating in earlier national studies, especially in the areas of faith maturity, involvement in congregational activities, and positive rating of their congregation. Interviews with the young people, adult youth workers, youth ministers and pastors in these congregations strongly supported the picture of vital faith in the youth of these exemplary congregations. Indeed what was most impressive in the interviews was the depth and freshness with which these young people give expression to the content of their faith and the manner in which it deeply informed their lives. The data from both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the study provides overwhelming evidence that the young people in these congregations are men and women of vital faith.

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This article was developed from the forthcoming book, *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry* by Dr. Roland Martinson (Luther Seminary) and Dr. Wesley Black (Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary).  
Project Website: [www.exemplarym.com](http://www.exemplarym.com).

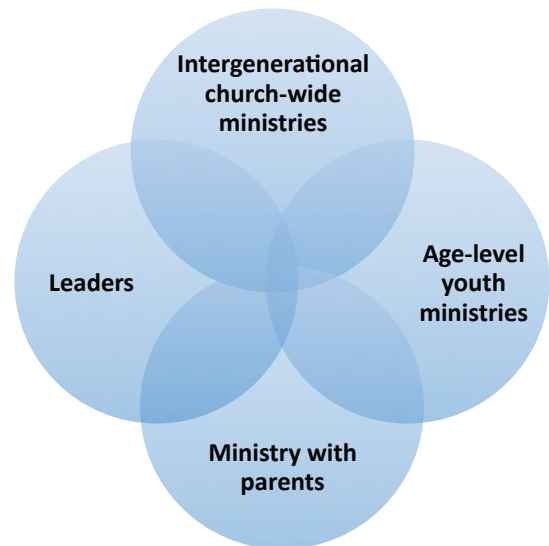
## It's All About Congregational Culture

The EYM congregations present a portrait of the strong impact faith communities can have on the faith and lives of young people when churches set their minds to fully enfranchise young people in their life and ministry. When pastors, congregational leaders, parents and adult leaders work together to promote real commitment to young people as full members of the body of Christ and carry that commitment across the life and mission of the entire congregation, teenagers mature in faith and grow to respect and love their church. The EYM Study demonstrates how age-level youth ministry and ministries with family are dependent upon and greatly enhanced by congregations setting young people and youth ministry as one of its essential priorities. If a congregation is not willing to make this commitment, youth and youth ministry will always be tangential and second rate. Congregational commitment to young people is essential for an effective ministry with youth.

While confirming the power of several well known youth ministry practices, the EYM Study pointed to a congregational “culture of the Spirit”— something more basic and central in establishing vital faith in youth. The research points to the value of a congregation’s culture endowed with a palpable sense of the living, active presence of God at work among 1) the people of the whole congregation, 2) its ministries with youth, 3) its parents, 4) the ministries of the larger congregation, and 5) its congregational leaders (pastor, youth minister, adult and youth leaders) as providing the most powerful, pervasive influence these congregations have on young people long-term. It is the communal awareness of participation in God’s presence and action that permeates the values, relationships, and activities of these congregations, giving rise to an atmosphere, a “culture of the Spirit,” focused on mission and the transformation of life that seems to make them so influential in the lives and faith of young people.

At the heart of this “culture of the Spirit” is the belief that God is present, active, and alive in everything they do. These are congregations that live their belief that Jesus Christ is present and graciously at work in and through the body of Christ for the sake of the salvation of the world. Their commitment: *We, his disciples, his Church are called to pass on faith and call young people to discipleship, witness and service.* From these shared beliefs and commitments flow the practices of ministry with youth.

The congregational “culture of the Spirit” generates four spheres of relationships and practices that intersect and powerfully impact the lives of young people in the EYM congregations.



- First, these congregations’ basic ministries are thoroughly **intergenerational**. Young people are welcomed and expected to participate and lead in church-wide ministries, including worship, education, fellowship, outreach, and decision-making.
- Second, these congregations have developed **age-level ministries** marked by trusted relationships and custom-designed ministry practices and activities within a caring atmosphere of high expectation. There are multiple nurturing relationships and activities intentionally planned to create an atmosphere of respect, growth and belonging that generates an “alternative youth subculture.”
- Third, these congregations educate **parents** in the faith and equip them for family/household caring conversations, prayer, Bible reading, and service.
- Fourth, these congregations are blessed with competent, faith-filled, **leadership** from the pastor to the youth minister to the adult and youth leaders who are committed to young people and developing their faith lives.

Aligning and integrating the intergenerational ministries of the congregation with adolescent age-level ministries and families/households, supported by competent, faith-filled leaders, generates intersecting arenas of influence that seem to make the work of these congregations so significant in the lives of their mature Christian youth.

# Part One. Youth of Maturing Faith

Using the research findings from previous studies on the beliefs and practices of committed Christian youth (such as “Effective Christian Education Study,” Search Institute, 1986), a profile of 34 characteristics of committed, maturing Christian youth was developed for identifying congregations with high concentrations of youth with a vibrant faith.

Within the 131 congregations that were selected for the EYM study, 2252 young people completed the project survey which included questions reflecting the 34 characteristics. The survey findings from the 2252 young people provide strong and detailed evidence of their vital, maturing Christian faith. The teenagers demonstrated significantly higher scores than historical averages on scales which provide rich descriptions of the faith of these young people. For example, young people in the 131 congregations scored significantly higher (7.74 out of 9) on the “A Personal Christianity” scale which included the following items:

- *I know that Jesus Christ is the son of God who died on a cross and rose again.*
- *God is a close personal friend who guides and protects me.*
- *My life is committed to Jesus Christ.*
- *I see evidence that God is active in the world.*
- *I am keenly aware of the presence of God.*
- *God cares for me in a special way.*
- *I have a sense of being saved in Christ.*

These young people are typical teens in so many ways, facing the challenges and struggles and joys of growing up in America today. Yet in matters of faith, they possess a desire to know and follow God that defines them, shapes their character, and guides their lives.

The following ten themes (each reflecting a series of questions on the youth survey) were the most significant findings giving evidence of Christian youth of vital faith in the 131 congregations. (Each is correlated to one of the seven characteristics of maturing Christian youth.)

Characteristics of Maturing Christian Youth (9 = highest score)	Rating
1. Personal Christianity (Characteristics 1 and 2)	7.74
2. Moral Responsibility (Characteristic 6)	7.37
3. Defends and Supports Friends (Characteristic 5)	6.86
4. Faith Impact of Church Involvement (Characteristic 3)	6.83
5. Faith Maturity (All Characteristics)	6.50
6. Personal Religiousness (Characteristics 1 and 2)	6.36
7. Seeks Spiritual Growth (Characteristic 1)	5.76
8. God Consciousness (Characteristic 2)	5.38
9. Lives a Life of Service (Characteristic 5)	5.35
10. Speaks Publicly about One’s Faith (Characteristic 2)	5.31

## Seven Characteristics

The findings about youth of vital faith in EYM congregations can be summarized in seven significant characteristics.



### Characteristic 1. Seeking Spiritual Growth

Youth of maturing faith are curious, actively pursuing questions of faith. They want to know what it means to believe in God and what it’s like to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. They frequent Bible studies and small group discussions where they can voice their doubts, find answers to their questions, and learn how to speak intelligently about what they believe. These curious young people are open to the activity of God in their lives and regularly speak about seeking God’s



guidance as well as asking friends what God has recently done in their lives. For these young people, their congregations and youth ministries provide settings where they have relationships through which they learn more about the faith and its implications for daily life. They worship, pray and study the Bible individually. These young people are integrating faith into their very self.

### **Characteristic 2. Possessing a Vital Faith**

Youth of maturing faith are keenly aware of God: present and active in their lives, the lives of others, and the life of the world. God is experienced as an active presence, a “friend” who contributes to their lives as guide and protector. They talk about God in personal, intimate terms. They not only report that God is active in their lives, but they also see evidence of God’s activity in others and the world.

### **Characteristic 3. Practicing Faith in Community**

Youth of maturing faith actively practice their faith in Jesus Christ through regular attendance at worship, participation in ministry, and leadership in a congregation. In addition to faith’s significant role in their day-to-day existence, these committed young people exercise their faith personally and publically through communal religious practices. They are eager to worship, pray, and participate in the community with adults throughout the ministries of the congregation. They see their church as an important part of their Christian lives, a place where God is active. Most importantly, they understand the church as more than just their youth ministry; they feel very much a part of the larger life of the congregation.

Adult Christians in these congregations, especially those involved in leadership in youth ministry have powerful influence in young peoples’ lives. Most importantly, these young peoples’ involvement in their church community is not just receiving the support of the adults; they see themselves as active participants in the ministry and vision of the congregation.

One gets a larger and perhaps even different picture of an effective ministry with youth from these young people’s comments which reflect an inclusive intergenerational understanding of the church, an understanding of the church in which ministry with young people is a congregation-

wide commitment, a ministry in which young people become “fully practicing participants.”

### **Characteristic 4. Making the Christian Faith a Way of Life**

Youth of maturing faith recognize God’s “call” and integrate their beliefs into the conversations, decisions, and actions of daily life. In addition to believing in Jesus Christ, these young people claim that faith makes a difference in their lives and regularly speak about and act-out their faith with family and friends, and even strangers. Faith is a driving force in their lives. When speaking about reasons for what they do, they mention faith as a significant impetus for their actions. They also speak about the Christian faith as a necessary force in society that helps them and others develop defined, constructive values and attitudes. For these committed Christian adolescents, faith is not something just to know or to understand, or even to believe. Faith is something one lives; something one does; something one is.

### **Characteristic 5. Living a Life of Service**

Youth of maturing faith are “turned outward from themselves” toward others and the world. In speech and action they serve others and take public stands on moral issues and advocate for justice. They reach out to neighbors and friends in times of crises with comfort and support. They have friends of diverse socioeconomic, ethnic and religious backgrounds. They are especially concerned about the “shunned” or “difficult” or “losers.” These young people get involved in church and community. For them faith is active participation in God’s mission in the world. The importance of service in their lives is yet another example of the integrative faith of these young people. Their faith is expressed in action for the sake of others.

### **Characteristic 6. Exercising Moral Responsibility**

Youth of maturing faith involve their faith in God in their decision-making and direction-setting. Through Bible study, conversation with Christian friends, prayer and “faith-informed reflection,” God helps them determine right or wrong as well as supports them in their decisions. These adolescents find God calling them to help others. They discourage others from being irresponsible

or dishonest. They know the moral decisions they make now will affect their future. They see hurtful actions taken not only as damaging to other people, but also as sin against God. These young people are known for their honesty, integrity, hospitality and kindness.

### Characteristic 7. Possessing a Positive Spirit

Youth of maturing faith are optimistic and full of hope. They are convinced they can make the world a better place. This positive spirit is reflected in their participation in the lives of other Christian youth for whom they have high regard, care for, and frequently defend. In a world where adolescent development is consistently disconnected from spirituality, these young people are concrete examples of how spiritual development appears to have generated a hopeful, confident spirit that characterizes their sense of self and their positive stance toward one another and the world.

It is clear from the research findings that congregations *can* nurture youth of vital Christian faith. The study found congregations with high percentages of committed, maturing Christian youth. What's going on in these congregations that is contributing to vital faith in young people? What are these congregations doing that is making a difference in the faith lives of young people? What are the qualities and practices of these congregations that can serve as a guide for all congregations? To these questions we now turn our attention.

## Part Two. Faith Assets™: A Framework for Developing Youth of Vital Faith

One of the most important contributions of the Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry is the identification of 44 Faith Assets™ that contribute to the development of a vital Christian faith in young people. Developed from the survey results of the 131 “exemplary” congregations and the on-site interviews with 21 of these congregations (3 in each of the 7 denominations), the Faith Assets are elements or building blocks that constitute a framework for developing faith in young people. The study points to these 44 elements as ways and means through which

congregations have over time, with great effort and struggle, built their capacities to influence the faith and lives of young people.



The 44 Faith Assets are grouped into three categories:

#### ■ Congregational Assets

1. Congregational Faith
2. Leadership of the Pastor
3. Congregational Qualities
4. Youth Involvement in the Congregation

The 22 Congregational Faith Assets describe the values and dynamics of the intergenerational life and ministry of the larger congregation. One of the major findings from the research study is the emphasis on congregational culture as essential for nurturing youth of maturing Christian faith and for sustaining an effective youth ministry. The Congregational Faith Assets reflect attributes the congregation as a whole brings to its relationships with youth. These 22 Faith Assets describe aspects of the congregation's theological orientation, faith maturity, pastoral leadership, values, attitudes, and practices that bear directly on its capacity to engage and influence young people. Each Faith Asset identifies an element of the congregation's overall functioning that contributes to effective ministries with youth.

#### ■ Youth Ministry Assets

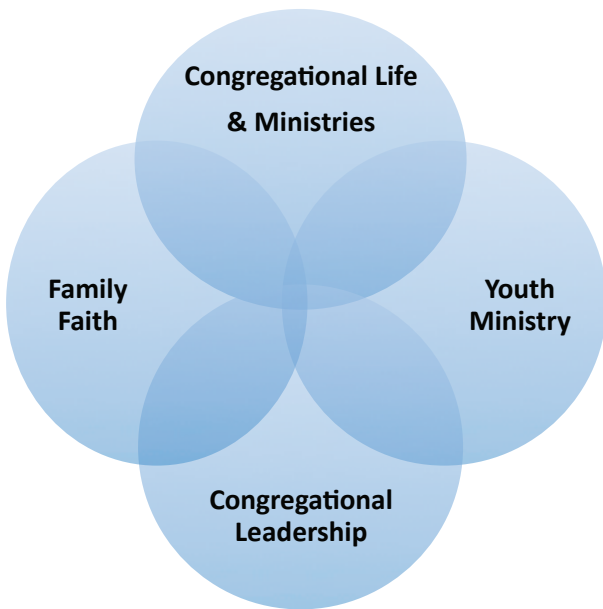
1. The Leadership of the Youth Minister
2. Adult and Youth Leaders
3. Youth Ministry Qualities

This 17 Youth Ministry Faith Assets describe the quality of the congregation's age-level ministries with youth. Six of these Faith Assets express the strength of the primary youth minister in the congregation. Five of the Faith Assets describe the effectiveness of the peer and adult leadership in youth ministry. Six of the Faith Assets indicate the attitudes, expectations and practices of the congregation's age-level ministries with youth. These 17 Faith Assets describe a kind of age-level "subculture" of quality ministry within the larger intergenerational culture of quality ministry with young people.

■ **Family/Household Faith Assets**

The 4 Family/Household Faith Assets describe the importance of family faith, adding another influence to the youth-friendly culture of the whole congregation and the effective age-level ministry with youth. The Family/Household Faith Assets describe the faith life and faith practices at home, and the role of the congregation in equipping and support parental and family faith.

What emerges from the 44 Faith Assets is four integrated overlapping spheres of influence: 1) congregational life and ministries, 2) age-level youth ministry, 3) family/household faith, and 4) congregational leadership (the competent and effective leadership of pastors, youth ministers, and adult and youth leaders).



It is important to remember that the 44 Faith Assets are descriptive, not prescriptive. They are not *the* definitive list. They are part of a growing body of knowledge about faith maturing in youth. They are a roadmap for developing congregations and youth ministries that promote youth of maturing faith. The 44 Faith Assets are cumulative. They build on each other. The more the better for everyone involved: the congregation, leaders, families, and young people. The key is working toward the "tipping point" when the cumulative effect of the 44 Faith Assets creates a congregational spirit and culture that maximizes efforts to nurture youth of maturing Christian faith.

An "asset-building mentality" counteracts so many stereotypes about youth ministry. For example, it confronts the "deficit mentality"—the popular misconception that we need to "solve the youth problem" or that we need to intervene to help youth through their many crises. It also counteracts the continual search for the one magic formula, activity, or program that will turn a youth ministry into superstar status. Lastly, it counteracts the myth that only large congregations with lots of resources and staff can do effective youth ministry. In an asset-building approach, *every congregation has Faith Assets*. It is only a question of how many assets. Congregations need to discover the Faith Assets that are already at work and then chart a plan for developing more assets. An asset building approach offers very tangible qualities and practices that every congregation can adopt that contribute to an effective youth ministry and nurturing youth of maturing Christian faith.

## 1. Congregation Faith and Qualities

*What kind of congregational faith and life nurtures youth of maturing Christian faith? A surprising discovery emerges from the findings of the EYM study: entire congregations make a difference in youth ministry. The congregations in the study are powerful faith- and life-shaping systems. Youth ministry doesn't exist on the side of or separate from the entire life and ministries of the congregation. Youth ministry is integrated into and supported by the congregation as a whole. Data from this study indicates that effective youth ministry exists as an integral dimension of a youth-friendly, youth-engaging congregation.*

## A> Congregational Faith

One cluster of Faith Assets focuses largely on the congregation’s theological commitments and the strategic decisions and patterns of ministry that flow from those theological commitments.

**Asset 1. God’s Living Presence:** The congregation possesses a sense of God’s living presence in community, at worship, through study, and in service.

**Asset 2. Centrality of Faith:** The congregation recognizes and participates in God’s sustaining and transforming life and work.

**Asset 3. Emphasizes Prayer:** The congregation practices the presence of God as individuals and community through prayer and worship.

**Asset 4. Focuses on Discipleship:** The congregation is committed to knowing and following Jesus Christ.

**Asset 5. Emphasizes Scripture:** The congregation values the authority of Scripture in its life and mission.

**Asset 6. Centrality of Mission:** The congregation consistently witnesses, serves and promotes moral responsibility, and seeks justice.

The study’s data reflects theological commitments and ministry practices that flow from a sense of the living presence and activity of God. These commitments and practices find expression in several key themes:

- Scripture and most especially the Gospel are understood as prime “bearers” of God’s presence.
- Bible study and biblical literacy are extensive and substantive. Bible study and biblical knowledge are pursued as opportunities to “encounter God speaking to people today.”
- Congregational faith, life, and ministry are grounded in Jesus Christ—present and active within individuals and the whole community.
- Worship within the life of the community is understood as participation in the life and presence of God in the world.
- Prayer is a pervasive, core activity attached to every dimension of the congregation’s relationships, decisions, and activities.
- God’s presence is named and celebrated in the everyday life and work of youth and adults.

These themes and the Faith Assets are supported by findings from the research, as reflected in the six scales (series of questions.) in the chart. Notice the high degree of shared perceptions among youth, parents, and adult leaders in youth ministry.

Characteristics of Congregational Faith (9 = highest score)	Youth	Parents	Adult Leaders
Congregation’s Biblical Emphasis	7.16		
Congregation’s Moral Guidance	6.60	6.81	6.96
Teaches Core Christian Concepts		6.95	
Worship Services’ Positive Characteristics	6.29	6.27	6.40
Congregation Promotes Service	6.40	6.42	6.43
Congregation’s Mission Outreach	6.71		6.04

As we will see in the Youth Ministry Assets, the theological commitments of the congregation as a whole become the theological commitments of the congregation’s youth ministry. For example, because of the centrality of the Gospel and discipleship in congregational life, knowing Jesus Christ and following him in discipleship are at the core of these congregations’ youth ministries. A second example of this dynamic at work is the alignment of the mission/vision statements of the congregation and its youth ministry, reflecting striking similarities of both identity and mission. In part, the power of these congregations and their youth ministries lies in the integration of vision and mission.

## B> Congregational Qualities

Ten Faith Assets reflect congregational values, expectations and practices that promote respect for youth and the inclusion of youth in congregational life. These congregational qualities describe how the life and ministry of the congregation can engage youth and make a substantive contribution to their maturing faith.

**Asset 11. Supports Youth Ministry:** Youth and ministry with young people are high priorities for the congregation.

**Asset 12. Demonstrates Hospitality:** The congregation values and welcomes all people, especially youth.,



**Asset 13. Strives for Excellence:** The congregation sets high standards, evaluates, and engages in continuous improvement.

**Asset 14. Encourages Thinking:** The congregation welcomes questions and reflection on faith and life.

**Asset 15. Creates Community:** Congregational life reflects high quality personal and group relationships.

**Asset 16. Encourages Small Groups:** The congregation engages members in study, conversation, and prayer about faith in daily life.

**Asset 17. Promotes Worship:** The congregation expands and renews spirit-filled, uplifting worship.

**Asset 18. Fosters Ethical Responsibility:** The congregation encourages individual and social moral responsibility.

**Asset 19. Promotes Service:** The congregation sponsors outreach, service projects, and cultural immersions both locally and globally.

**Asset 20. Demonstrates Effective Practices:** The congregation engages in a wide variety of ministry practices and activities.

The impact of the congregations' integration of young people into the fabric of their lives and ministries is evident in the attitudes of their youth. The overall culture and climate of these congregations deeply impacts their young people as evidenced in the following scales (a set of survey questions) on the quality of congregational life. Young people's responses to questions regarding the life of their congregation demonstrate the content and force of their churches' influence in their lives. Notice how youth's perceptions are also reinforced by parents and adult leaders.

Congregational Qualities (9 = highest score)	Youth	Parents	Adult Leaders
Warm, Challenging Climate	7.05		
Welcoming Atmosphere		6.96	7.21
Satisfied with Congregation	6.93		
Importance of this Church to Me		7.73	7.96
Congregation's Moral Guidance	6.60	6.81	6.96
Congregation's Social Interaction	6.55	5.18	5.22
Congregation's Openness	6.35		
Members Experience Love and Support		6.92	

In the EYM congregations getting to know a personal and present God involves more than learning dogma or obeying a particular set of rules. These young people come to know a living and active God through relationships with God and the community. Certainly, young people learn the Gospel, the story of Christ, his teachings, and the rich and substantive Christian traditions. The young people in these congregations get to know Jesus Christ through the witness of believers and ongoing relationships with persons and communities who know Him. *The power of faithful, multi-generational Christian relationships ("sociality") is at the heart of effective youth ministry.*

## C> Youth Involvement in the Congregation

Two Faith Assets describe young people as full participants in the body of Christ who are given spiritual gifts necessary for the life of the congregation. The gifts of young people are identified, developed, and utilized as youth are invited into leadership and equipped for full ministry in the church and the world. Young people are encouraged to participate in all aspects of the congregation's life and ministry.

### Asset 21. Participate in the Congregation:

Youth are engaged in a wide spectrum of congregational relationships and practices.

### Asset 22. Assume Ministry Leadership:

Youth are invited, equipped and affirmed for leadership in congregational activities.

The findings from the survey confirm young people's positive experience of involvement in congregational life and ministries. These youth see their congregations to be effective and important to them in areas influential to their relationship with God. They are especially appreciative of their participation in congregational activities that receive significantly high scores.

Characteristics of Youth Involvement in the Congregation and Church Activities (9 = highest score)	Youth
Emphasis on Youth Participation in Congregation and Community by the Youth Ministry	7.16
Faith Impact of Church Involvement	6.83
Church Friendships	6.71
Church-Sponsored Trips	6.68
Faith-Influential Friends	6.40



Church Leadership Development Activities	5.91
Music Involvement	4.57

In contrast to many congregations who build relational youth ministries separate from the larger congregation, the youth ministries of the EYM congregations welcome young people into the center of the congregation's life together. The same relational qualities present in their youth ministries are evident in the life of these congregations as a whole.

## Conclusion

Young people's responses to these closely related items of congregational life and ministry demonstrate that youth in these exemplary congregations have a keen perception of and appreciation for their churches' substantive faithfulness and effectiveness in the lives of their members, including themselves. The ministry of the entire congregation is a major factor in young people's faith development and their eagerness to be a part of the community's relationships and practices. The study presents a picture of welcoming congregations who respect and value young people and their youth ministries. These congregations involve youth and adults in genuinely integrated relationships and activities. The mission and vision of their youth ministries are aligned with the mission and vision of the church, indeed, their youth ministries often lead the way. Their worship styles reflect an awareness of the sensibilities of their youth; the worship life of the young people often inspires adults to worship in fresh ways.

The essential message from this data, points to youth ministry as a valued, critical element of these congregation's mission and vision. Youth ministry matters in these congregations and the ministries of the entire congregation contribute substantively to faithful and effective ministry with young people.

## 2. Youth Ministry Qualities

For the majority of the congregations in the study, their age-level youth ministries grow out of shared commitments and practices that emerge from a relational approach to making disciples with young people. These congregations minister through foundational relationships and practices uniquely and meaningfully adapted to their contexts.

The effectiveness of a congregation's youth ministry does not lie in expansive programs. When asked why their congregation is able to do a good job in nurturing youth of maturing faith, 134 pastors and youth ministers in the 131 EYM congregations indicated that "it is the vision and strong support given by our congregation" and 109 of them indicated that, "(it is) the wide variety and nature of our youth ministries."

Six Faith Assets describes the qualities of a congregation's youth ministry—the beliefs, expectations and practices that mark age-level ministry with youth. Woven through the six Faith Assets is the use of a variety of ministry practices that are "custom-designed" to address the real lives of young people in a particular congregation.

### **Asset 34. Establishes a Caring Environment:**

Youth ministry provides multiple nurturing relationships and activities resulting in a welcoming atmosphere of respect, growth, and belonging.

**Asset 35. Develops Quality Relationship:** Youth ministry develops authentic relationships among youth and adults establishing an environment of presence and life engagement.

**Asset 36. Focuses on Jesus Christ:** Youth ministry's mission, practices, and relationships are inspired by the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

**Asset 37. Considers Life Issues:** Youth ministry values and addresses the full range of young people's lives.

**Asset 38. Uses Many Approaches:** Youth ministry intentionally and creatively employs multiple activities appropriate to the ministry's mission and context.

**Asset 39. Organized and Planned:** Youth ministry engages participants and leaders in long range planning, implementation, evaluation, and innovation in an atmosphere of high expectations.

These Faith Assets are reflected in the survey findings on Youth Ministry Qualities. Youth, parents, adults leaders, pastors and youth ministers in EYM congregations identify the most important qualities of an effective youth ministry, providing very positive ratings for congregation's efforts. Among the most important qualities that young people identify are the faith impact of youth ministry on their lives (see items 6 and 7), the relational and community qualities of

youth ministry (see items 1, 2, 3, 7), and distinct program features of a youth ministry such as well-organized, qualified adult leaders, creative and fun (see items 4 and 5). All groups affirm the importance and effectiveness of peer ministry (see item 8). Youth, parents, and adult leaders confirm the achievement of youth ministry's desired outcomes (see 9).

Youth Ministry Qualities (9 = highest score)	Y	P	AL	P & YM
1. Spiritual Support Group	8.39			
2. Emphasis on Prayer, Faith Study, Leadership, Safe and Caring Place	7.55			
3. Youth Gatherings Have a Warm, Welcoming Climate	7.44			
4. Youth Ministry's Structural Core (e.g., qualified youth workers, well run and organized, Christ-centered, safe and caring place)	7.36			
5. Youth Ministry Characteristics (Christ-centered, meaningful, creative, fun, qualified adult youth leaders, well organized)			7.25	
6. Impact on Personal Faith	7.28			
7. Emphasis on Participation in Congregation	7.16			
8. Peer Ministry	7.14	6.44	6.55	5.80
9. Achievement of Youth Ministry's Desired Outcomes (e.g., involving youth in ministry, creating community, helping youth making a commitment to Christ, connecting service involvement with Christian faith)	6.75	6.52	6.60	
10. Youth Ministry Effectiveness (e.g., achievement of desired outcomes, training adult and youth leaders, working with families)				6.08
11. Help with Life Issues	5.82			
12. Teaching Moral Values		6.60		
13. Adult-Youth Mentoring		6.56	6.31	
14. Adult-Youth Involvement Together		5.28	5.02	

[Y=youth, P=parents, AL=adult leaders, P=pastor, Y=youth minister]

## Caring Environment & Quality Relationships

Youth ministries in the study work from a foundation of authentic relationships and a caring environment. EYM congregations provide youth with a variety of settings and environments where their love of Jesus Christ becomes a relational lived experience. This can be seen in young people's very positive responses to "spiritual support group" (item 1), "emphasis on safe and caring place" (item 2) and "youth gatherings have a warm, welcoming climate" (item 3). A caring environment and quality relationships undergird worship, Bible study, classes, faith and life groups, music ministries, mission trips, and a multitude of other youth ministry practices. Pastors, youth ministers, and adult leaders facilitate the development of genuine relationships among adults and youth in these faith communities. Small groups are present everywhere in these youth ministries. Small groups encourage youth to speak out on issues and address concerns in their everyday lives. Small groups focus on Scripture and the discussion of young people's questions. They regularly include meditation, prayer, silence, rituals, and spiritual reflection. .

The EYM congregations find ways to involve young people in peer relationships throughout the life and ministry of the congregation. These church friends are a positive influence on each other's faith and significant contributors to each others' vitality and resiliency. These congregations reflected the power of peer relationships in small, intimate circles of youth in which community and strong relationships thrived. These groups were described as safe and welcoming environments by the participants of the study and consistently included engaging Bible study, prayer and service.

## Youth-Adult Mentoring

EYM congregations bring adults and youth together through adult-youth mentoring, which was highly rated by parents and adult leaders (items 13 and 14 above). These youth ministries recruit mature Christian adults who invest in young people. Youth in these churches report that these experiences help them grow in their faith. Adults sense the value of the mentoring and are honored to work with youth. These positive experiences with mentoring are communicated throughout the congregations which "fuels" the recruitment of new mentors. Several

congregations reported “relationship-based” ministries with adult-youth mentoring as the “center-pieces” of their work. In these ministries relationships are fostered through carefully designed practices that support adult-youth and peer-to-peer faith mentoring conversations. The development of caring adult youth leaders was essential to the substance of the youth ministries in the EYM congregations.

## Prayer

Prayer, in a variety of forms and settings, is an emphasis in EYM congregations and their youth ministries (see item 2 and the Congregational Faith Assets). Prayer is integrated in all youth ministry programs and activities. Young people study about prayer and learn how to pray. Adults in the congregations prayed specifically and persistently for young people by group and by name.

## Retreats

All of the 21 congregations studied through on-site visits discovered that something uniquely transformative occurs when their ministries take youth out of the ordinary rhythms and settings of their lives into focused, intense experiences of God and God’s action through retreats of spiritual exploration and mission. Retreats are transformational process in which young people encounter God first-hand. For young people these are times when information about God becomes an opportunity to meet God, to expand their understandings of God and his activity, and to know God first-hand as God changed the world through them.

## Service and Outreach

Service and outreach is a distinctive strength of the EYM congregations and their youth ministries. Pastors, youth ministers, parents, adult youth workers, and youth are seriously emphasizing, equipping for, and engaging in service and outreach. They see their congregations as valuing “Mission Outreach,” “Social Responsibility,” and “Service Activities.” They see their congregations preparing young people and adults for mission. Second, young people are becoming and doing what the congregations are equipping them to do. They are

involved in service and active in public witness and ministry.

<b>Service and Outreach Characteristics</b> (9 = highest score)	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Parents</b>	<b>Adult Leaders</b>	<b>Pastors &amp; Youth Minister</b>
Lives a Life of Service	5.35			
Mission Effectiveness of the Congregation	6.71			
Congregation Promotes Service Activities	6.40	6.42	6.43	
Youth’s Service Involvement		7.30	7.62	7.71
Youth’s Outreach		6.50	6.50	6.78
Social Responsibility		6.16	6.56	
Congregation’s Mission Outreach		5.82	6.04	

## Custom-Designed Youth Ministry Practices, Programs, and Activities

Youth ministry in EYM congregations might well be characterized as “ordinary practices done extraordinarily well” in response to the needs of youth in their communities. These custom-designed youth ministry practices can be seen in the wide variety of activities in these youth ministries sponsor. The following practices, programs, and activities are a part of the youth ministry offerings in most of the EYM congregations: 1) community life and relationships, 2) Bible study, 3) religious education, 4) retreats, 5) mission trips and service projects, 6) social events, 7) sports, 8) family and intergenerational activities, 9) youth-oriented worship, 10) adult and youth leadership training, and 11) special events such as youth conventions.

Innovative and unique approaches to custom-designed youth ministries flow from the congregations’ pastoral and youth ministry leadership teams. Over 85% of the youth ministers surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “Doing things in new and creative ways is appreciated by my senior/lead pastor or supervisor.” Nearly 70% of the ministers described their congregations as being “willing to change the way things are done to increase involvement in the church.” Over half of the ministers (58.5%) either agreed or strongly agreed that their congregation is innovative. These creative and

innovative EYM youth ministries take place in the context of respect and openness in congregations that are willing to take risks and accept change.

## Jesus Christ and Discipleship

One could sum up the purpose of the EYM congregations' youth ministries in a single goal: *making disciples of Jesus Christ*. These congregations focus their youth ministries on Jesus Christ and engage young people in discipleship, witness, and service that transforms their lives. Several "marks and means" of discipleship emerge in the study. These elements describe the core attributes of the congregations, their youth ministries, and their young people.

- **Disciples Know Jesus Christ:** Discipleship is grounded in the teachings, life, death, resurrection and Lordship of Jesus Christ alive and present. Disciples are in relationship with Christ, learn about Christ and follow Christ's leading. In the vast majority of congregations in the study, youth ministry is consciously designed to cultivate a relationship with Jesus Christ through worship, prayer, community-building, study, retreats, and service.
- **Disciples Know the Bible:** Discipleship is anchored in Bible study. It is in the Bible that youth learn the story, the truth, that shapes the life of faith. Bible studies take many shapes and forms. Most popular are small group conversational explorations of the Scripture texts in which youth and their leaders "hear" God speaking truth to their lives. Bible studies are a constitutive exercise in discipleship.
- **Disciples Know the Christian Faith:** Discipleship is learning the Christian faith. The Christian faith has a history, traditions, beliefs and values that are critical to its shaping and transforming power. Congregations are committed to teaching young people the content of the Christian faith through a variety of ministry experiences. Adult leaders guide young people in exploring the long and rich life of the people of God, creating more sturdy beliefs, engaging the tough questions, and assisting youth in finding their own "faith voice."

- **Disciples Make Faith a Way of Life:** Discipleship is the "knowledge of faith" becoming a way of life. Discipleship is regularly described as much in languages of the "heart" and the "hands" as of the "head." For the congregations in the study, it was not enough for young people to know the content of Scripture or to understand the richness of Christian beliefs. Whether small or large these churches developed expansive ministries with youth for the purpose of participating in faith as a way of life. The adults and youth in these ministries seemed to be "living into" faith that is simultaneously centered in God yet genuinely their own. They spoke about what they believed with conviction and in fresh language. Compassion, honesty, respect, integrity, service to others and justice were evident in their speech, life styles and relationships with others. All this was carried on with an eye on both tradition and experience; text and context; faith and life.
- **Disciples are Mentored:** Discipleship is formed in relationships with mentoring individuals and communities. Even though discipleship is primarily a faith-relationship in which Christ is at the center, adolescent disciples are formed in relationship with other Christians. Whole congregations become intergenerational crucibles in which conversation, relationships and practices wrap youth in a culture of "knowing and doing God." Within these congregations, people walk intentionally and directly along side young people providing diverse, concrete "snapshots" of following Jesus Christ as these mentors encourage and teach through their presence, speech and action.
- **Disciples are Equipped:** A young person's strengths and gifts of the Spirit are integral to discipleship. To follow Christ involves a call to witness and to serve others. To make disciples is to identify a teenager's spiritual gifts and equip that teenager for service in the church and the world. Congregations combine study, fellowship, personal strengths and spiritual gifts discovery with service to equip young disciples to follow Jesus Christ in the church and into the world.



## An Emerging Pattern of Youth Ministry

Based on the analysis of the results from the visits and interviews of the 21 EYM congregations, a “pattern” to their youth ministries began to emerge.

- Focus on ministry with youth “outside as well as within” the faith community.
- Make contact with those who do not belong to a congregation or who don’t know Christ or who are different or in need.
- Speak with outsiders about faith and Jesus Christ and/or serve them at their point of need.
- Invite those outside the congregation to experience Jesus Christ through participation in his “body,” the community of faith.
- When new people come, welcome them into the faith community and encourage them to stay and become participants in it’s life.
- Through worship, prayer, Bible study, discipleship groups, and ongoing faith relationships (e.g., mentoring) nurture young people’s life and faith.
- Identify young people’s strengths and gifts and invite them into leadership utilizing their “giftedness” to build up the body of Christ.
- Equip young people both for leadership within the congregation and for following Christ in the world.
- Send young people out into the world to serve others and bear witness to Jesus Christ.

While not every congregation articulated all of these elements, and each congregation worked at the elements of the pattern differently, one could see a flow of “welcoming, instructing, equipping and sending” at work in the congregation’s mission statements and strategies of ministry. What’s more, “sending into the world” seemed to be integral to the congregation’s understanding of a young person’s relationship with God. For these ministries with youth, the life of faith includes, in its dynamics and its maturity, following Christ into witness and service in the world. Doing Christ’s mission in the world, these young Christians meet God in new ways, are drawn outside their egocentricity, and come to understand more fully the creative, restorative and transformative work of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

## 3. Family and Household Faith

Five Faith Assets describe the role of family/ household faith, adding another influence to the youth-friendly culture of the whole congregation and the effective age-level ministry with youth. The family/household Faith Assets describe faith practices at home and the role of the congregation in equipping and support parental and family faith.

### **Asset 40. Possess Strong Parental Faith:**

**Parents possess and practice a vital and informed faith.** A vital and informed parental faith includes understanding the Christian faith, participating in worship, praying, and engaging in service and mission. Young people are in households and relationships with parents where mature faith is cultivated and modeled.

### **Asset 41. Promotes Family Faith Practices:**

**Parents engage youth and the whole family in conversations, prayer, Bible reading, and service that nurture faith and life.** Parents not only know and live Christianity themselves, they draw their teenagers into faith practices. Parents pray with their adolescents at table, at family celebrations, during times of crises and over individual and family decisions. Service is a way of life. Together parents and young people “turn their faces outward” and live life for others.

### **Asset 42. Reflects Family Harmony: Family members’ expressions of respect and love create an atmosphere promoting faith.**

Families and households find ways to navigate the challenges and stresses of daily life with approaches marked by respect, equal regard, open communication, and cooperation. Parents, grandparents and others practice individual accountability, forgiveness and reconciliation modeling faith in action and generating an atmosphere where faith can be referenced and discussed.

### **Asset 43. Equips Parents: The congregation offers instruction and guidance that nurture parental faith and equip parents for nurturing faith at home.** Congregations provide strong adult faith formation,

emphasizing adult discipleship and offering strong preaching, Bible studies, small groups and many forms of adult Christian education. Programs develop parental faith and prepare parents for nurturing the faith of their children and adolescents.

**Asset 44. Fosters Parent-Youth Relationships: The congregation offers parent-youth activities that strengthen parent-youth relationships.** Parent-youth programs focus on adolescent-specific issues such as family communication, adolescent independence, decision-making, choosing friends, sexual expression, and conflict resolution; as well as faith themes such as studying the Bible together, discussing case studies from youth culture, and exploring popular media. Parent-youth programs enhance the capacity of parents and teenagers to communicate and work together on matters of faith and life.

## Faith Influence of Parents and Families

Echoing other major studies of adolescent faith formation conducted in the last two decades, the EYM study affirms the contribution that parents and other family members make to the faith maturity of youth. Young people reference their parents' faith as models of the Christian life. Teenagers talk about their parents and friends of their parents reaching out to care for them. Young people know about their parents' vital faith not only from observing them at church, but also from conversations about faith and daily life at meals, in the car or on intergenerational, family mission trips—practices encouraged by the church's ministry with families. These parents read the Bible and pray with their teenagers. They include their young people in faith-informed discussions of family decision and budgets. These discussions have been encouraged by parent-youth case study conversations during youth ministry activities.

<b>Influence of Family as Rated by Youth</b> (9 = highest score)	
Family Harmony (Lack of Family Disharmony)	7.19
Parents Are Affectionate	6.83
Lack of Parental Verbal Abuse	6.41
Mother Helps with Problems	6.29
Mother Influences My Faith	6.15
Father Helps with Problems	5.60
Family Influences My Faith	5.41

<b>Parent and Family Faith Qualities</b> (9 = highest score)	
God Consciousness	8.23
Moral Responsibility	7.97
Family Disharmony	7.03
Family Orientation	7.02
Use of Faith Support Group	6.70
Centrality of Faith	6.99
Social Responsibility	6.16
Desire for Participating in Leadership, Community, and Spirituality	6.49

One of the study's scales, "Family Influences My Faith," includes the question: "How often does your family (the people you live with) sit down together and talk about God, the Bible, or other religious things?" One in four young people said their family does this on a weekly or daily basis, and 40% once or twice a month. The percentages of how often the families sit down together to talk about God or matters of faith are significantly higher than those in previous studies. Young people in exemplary congregations explore understandings of God and matters of faith in their families. Faith instruction does not only occur in the congregation and youth ministry. Families reinforce what's learned at church through intentional faith practices and conversations at home.

The family's capacity to influence adolescent faith can also be seen in the spiritual guidance and modeling of fathers, mothers, and extended family members. Both mothers and fathers were identified as positive influences on young peoples' faith, with fathers especially, scoring significantly higher than in previous studies.

## Equipping Parents to Pass on Faith

During the last twenty years youth ministry has reclaimed the role of family in faith formation. This renewed involvement of families in ministry with young people is evident in the values and practices of the congregations of the study. Congregations in the study have invited parents into partnership with the church in nurturing the faith of their sons and daughters. Parents exercise their partnership by participating in assessment and planning. They become the eyes and ears for the youth minister as they listen to what other parents are saying and experiencing. These parents provide realistic perspectives on what is going well in the congregation's ministry with youth as well as identify

challenges that need attention in their own families and the families of the community.

Ministry with families strengthens parenting skills especially around the developmental needs of teenagers. Parent sessions address topics of interest to parents of youth by serving as a safe place where concerned parents can work with their issues and questions. Youth ministers meet with groups of parents to evaluate past events and get their input on ministry direction and upcoming events. Congregations in the study create networks of ministry in which parents, youth, and extended families are instructed and healed. These networks of support for families provide a framework in which parents deepen their faith, grow in their ability to raise teenagers and expand their capacities to nurture faith in their young people.

Here are the ratings of the effectiveness of the EYM youth ministries in working with parents.

<b>Youth Ministry &amp; Parents Characteristics</b> (9 = highest score)	<b>Adult Leaders</b>	<b>Pastor &amp; Youth Minister</b>
Adult Workers' Relationship with Parents	6.93	
Helps Parents with Parenting Issues	5.23	
Effectiveness of Parental Education	3.97	
Strengthening Parent-Youth Relationships		4.41
Support of Families in Conflict Situations		4.16
Equipping Parents		4.70

Youth ministers in the study noted the contribution their ministries make to strengthening families and parents. One scale, "Strengthening Parent-Youth Relationships," reflects scores significantly higher than those in a recent national study of full time youth ministers. Ministers were asked, "How well is each of these aspects of your congregation's youth ministry being achieved or realized?" Their responses included:

- Helping parents become more involved in the lives of their youth
- Providing opportunities for teens and parents to interact
- Helping parents recognize and adopt wise methods of discipline
- Strengthening family relationships
- Providing help for teaching Christian concepts of right and wrong

The significantly higher scores on these items might well be related to the close family relationships that exist in most of the congregations studied. These high scores could also be a reason these families have more positive influence on the faith of their teenagers than parents in previous studies.

Strengthening a family's capacity to nurture life and pass on faith to their young people is evident in the study. One scale, "Equipping Parents," contained the key elements on which congregations in the study scored higher than those in historical studies:

- Providing education and resources parents needed to teach their youth Christian concepts of right and wrong
- Encouraging parent-youth communication through classes on how to discuss adolescent issues with youth
- Helping parents share their faith with their youth at home by such things as rituals, faith conversations, etc.
- Encouraging families to teach service as a way of life through their involvement in helping activities
- Showing parents how to foster the development of moral values in their children
- Establishing a network of care and support for youth and their families

Cross referencing these scales with others reflecting the faith commitments of youth, indicate that close parent-youth bonds, help and support given to families in conflict, and efforts made toward equipping parents of teenagers for navigating adolescence are positively related to vital faith in young people.

Supporting and strengthening families is a ministry of the whole congregation. Families are nurtured through the ministries and the quality relationships in the congregation. This can be seen in the high scores give congregational life in the survey.

<b>Congregational Life Characteristics</b> (9 = highest score)	<b>Parents Rating</b>
Importance of this Church to Me	7.73
Welcoming Atmosphere	6.96
Congregation's Moral Guidance	6.81
Congregation Promotes Service	6.42
Teaches Core Christian Concepts	6.95
Members Experience Love and Support	6.92
Congregation Makes Me Think	6.36
Satisfaction with Worship	6.27
Congregation Open to Change	6.25

Adult Education Effectiveness	5.96
Congregation's Social Interaction	5.18

## Parental Involvement in Youth Ministry

The results of the study clearly indicate that parents are supportive of their congregation's effective youth ministries. One of the reasons for this support: they view the congregation's ministry to be a positive force in the lives of their sons and daughters. One church reported that families join the parish because the youth ministry provides a hospitable, substantive environment that is a safe place for their teenagers. These parents appreciate the knowledge of the faith, the values, and the leadership skills they see developed in the youth of the congregation and encourage their sons and daughters to participate.

The partnerships between the congregation and the families of their youth create a working synergy that enables the congregation, its youth ministry, and the families to contribute more to the lives and faith of their young people. In many congregations parents were directly involved in the congregation's youth ministry relationships and activities, serving as leaders/facilitators for Bible study groups, mission trips, retreats, worship, and small groups. Congregations also involve parents in planning processes to shape the direction of youth ministry. Given parents profound influence in the lives of their teens, their involvement in youth ministry is a potential source of growth in faith and life for both teenagers and their parents.

Quality relationships at church had a positive impact on young people's families. Two scales of the survey indicate that building strong relationships at church improved the atmosphere in families. The study revealed that family relationships are strengthened when families were equipped at church: 1) to engage in service activities with their teenage sons and daughters, and 2) when they were equipped for teaching Christian concepts of right and wrong to their adolescents. Parents indicated that they often struggle with the challenges of discussing their values with their children, and are left feeling alone and isolated because of the cultural forces impacting their sons and daughters. Thus they deeply value the support these congregations provided in assisting in passing their values on to their children.

## 4. Leadership in the Congregation

### Leadership of the Pastor

Pastors matter immensely in effective youth ministry! And they matter in very specific ways. Pastors lead through their spiritual influence, their pastoral effectiveness, their love for and support of young people, and their support of youth ministry leaders. In the EYM congregations, pastors are the most influential persons among the many adults and youth sharing leadership in these effective ministries with youth.

Four Faith Assets describe the traits and leadership of the pastor regarding youth and youth ministry within the congregation. Taken together these four Faith Assets describe how influential a pastor's role is in the overall faithfulness and effectiveness of a congregation's ministries with youth.

**Asset 7. Spiritual Influence:** The pastor knows and models the transforming presence of God in life and ministry.

**Asset 8. Interpersonal Competence:** The pastor builds a sense of community and relates well with adults and youth.

**Asset 9. Supports Youth Ministry:** The pastor understands, guides, and advocates for youth ministry.

**Asset 10. Supports Leaders:** The pastor affirms and mentors youth and adults leading youth ministry.

### The Pastor's Spiritual Influence

The pastors witness to their own faith in speech and action does not go unnoticed in their churches. Youth ministers, adult youth workers, parents, and young people identify four ingredients of spiritual influence: 1) their pastor's expression of what they personally believe, 2) their pastor's faith practices, 3) the way their pastor's public ministry was an expression of an authentic faith, and 4) the way their pastor's faith was integrated in their pastor's lifestyle. Furthermore, the pastor's personal faith and its undergirding theology seemed to be one of the critical elements in the faith maturity of the congregation.

Pastors influence young people, and the congregation, in the ways they talk about God, pray, and ask for forgiveness when they hurt someone. Young people report that their pastors have a direct



and profound impact on them spiritually and relationally. They say that the “Pastor’s Personal Characteristics” model Christian life in a manner that gives faith integrity and inspires them to be faithful.

Five scales focusing on the pastor’s spiritual influence received high scores from youth, parents, and adult youth workers:

Pastor’s Spiritual Influence Characteristics (9 = highest score)	Y	P	AL	P & YM
Pastor’s Spiritual Influence (pastor’s faith, pastoral skills, passion for ministry)	7.37			
Pastor’s Personal Characteristics (pastor’s personal relational and ministerial skills)	7.13			
Pastor is a Good Counselor		6.82	7.02	
Pastor Preaches to Make Disciples		6.71	6.80	
Pastor’s Mission Is to Make Disciples				6.94

[Y=youth, P=parents, AL=adult leaders, P=pastor, Y=youth minister]

### The Pastor’s Effectiveness

The pastor’s effectiveness as a leader has a significant influence on the congregation and youth ministry. Four scales that describe the pastor’s leadership role receive high scores from youth, parents, and adult youth workers:

Pastor Effectiveness Characteristic (9 = highest score)	Youth	Parents	Adult Leaders
Pastor’s Personal Characteristics (pastor’s personal relational and ministerial skills)	7.13		
Effectiveness of Pastor’s Leadership		7.88	7.90
Interpersonal Characteristics		7.80	
Pastor’s Communication Skills		7.30	7.48

### The Pastor’s Relational Skills

Pastors build relationships with youth, and they encourage and equip their congregations to do the same. They have a genuine interest in people, especially young people, and possess the capacity to make “heart to heart” connections with people of all ages. The relational ability of the pastor has a direct relationship to the capacity of the congregation to nurture mature levels of faith in youth and adults.

Pastors have great influence in generating a culture in which effective ministry with youth can occur through their authenticity, directness, and compassion in relationships. This in turn cultivates authenticity, directness and compassion throughout the congregation, especially in the congregation’s relationships with young people.

Pastor’s Relational Skills Characteristics (9 = highest score)	Youth	Parents	Adult Leaders
Pastor’s Personal Characteristics (pastor’s personal relational and ministerial skills)	7.13		
Interpersonal Characteristics		7.80	
Pastor’s Communication Skills		7.30	7.48

### The Pastor’s Support

Pastors have strong working relationships with their youth ministry leadership team. Pastors support the congregation’s youth minister, value the work of adult youth workers, and are involved in the strategic planning of ministries with youth. Pastors also have high levels of support for and commitment to Christian education and youth ministry. Three scales describe the pastor’s support:

Pastor Support Characteristics (9 = highest score)	Adult Leaders	Pastor & Youth Minister
Pastor Supports Christian Education and Youth Ministry	8.05	
Pastor Support for Youth Staff		7.76
Pastor Creates a Healthy Climate		7.39

*When you combine these four sets of strengths—spiritual influence, leadership, relationships, and support—a composite of powerful influence emerges. The effectiveness of the leadership of the pastor and the attitudes of the pastor regarding young people combine with the pastor’s relational wisdom and skill to position pastors among the most influential factors in a congregation’s youth ministries.*

### Leadership of the Youth Minister

Six Faith Assets describe the strengths of the primary youth minister in the congregation. The youth minister is both a competent leader with theological and ministry knowledge and skill, and a faith-filled role model for youth and adults.

**Asset 23. Provides Competent Leadership:** The youth minister demonstrates superior theological, theoretical, and practical knowledge and skill in leadership.

**Asset 24. Models Faith:** The youth minister is a role model reflecting a living faith for youth and adults.

**Asset 25. Mentors Faith Life:** The youth minister assists adult leaders and youth in their faith life both one-on-one and in groups.

**Asset 26. Develops Teams:** The youth minister reflects a clear vision and attracts gifted youth and adults into leadership.

**Asset 27. Knows Youth:** The youth minister knows youth and the changes in youth culture, and utilizes these understandings in ministry.

**Asset 28. Establishes Effective Relationships:** The youth minister enjoys effective relationships with youth, parents, volunteers, and staff.

These Faith Assets are reflected in five significant scales from the survey findings.

Youth Minister Leadership Characteristics (9 = highest score)	Youth	Parents	Adult Leaders
Youth Minister's Positive Characteristics	7.87		
Youth Minister's Leadership		8.14	
Youth Minister's Competence		8.14	7.95
Youth Minister's Effectiveness			7.83
Youth Minister Characteristics			7.24

These scales describe the qualities of the youth minister who possesses: 1) a vitality of faith; 2) a commitment to youth; 3) the capacity to relate well with youth and adults; 4) knowledge of Scripture and the Christian faith; 5) the ability to discover other's gifts and strengths; 6) effectiveness in recruiting, training and supporting adult and youth leadership; 7) the ability to assist a congregation in supporting youth ministry; 8) the capacity to handle conflict; and 9) a commitment to caring for his or her own spiritual, social and physical health.

One of the key elements for effective youth ministry is the relational ability of the youth minister: establishing close relationships with young people, and modeling and fostering significant relationships among young people and adults in the congregation. There are plentiful, positive interaction between adults and youth. As a result youth feel adults in the

church understand them. Youth ministers build bridges between the congregation and their young people. Like a bridge that has anchors in two land masses, the youth minister has influence in both the adult and youth worlds. Adults may not grasp their crucial role in influencing youth without someone guiding them in the process. By teaching and modeling for the congregation the importance of building closer bonds with young people, youth ministers can not only set the pace for volunteers and lay a solid foundation for team work with other staff, they can also foster a congregational community that nurtures teenage faith maturity.

One unique feature of the youth ministers in the study is that they all had served in the same congregation for many years, developing connections and networks of influence and leadership. It appears from the research that four factors contribute to the effectiveness and the long terms of youth ministers:

1. A congregation with high expectations "calls" a person of strong faith and passion for ministry with youth.
2. Once that person has been called, the congregation supports them with prayer, resources, ongoing education, and networks of support.
3. The person who has been called thrives in this culture of high expectations, ample resources, ongoing learning and strong support. The youth minister deepens his or her commitment, expands personal investment, and fires the imagination. Full of spirit and hope, the youth minister stays for years even decades.
4. The youth minister's faithfulness and effectiveness inspires the congregation to higher expectations, imagination and support. And forward it goes over long periods of expanding impact in the lives of young people.

## Youth and Adult Leadership

A cluster of five Faith Assets describe youth and adult leadership—people of a vibrant and informed Christian faith who are "called" to youth ministry leadership. They are in significant relationships with each other and with the young people of the congregation. They prepare for their ministry through training and apprenticeships in their leadership roles.

**Asset 29. Equipped for Peer Ministry:** Youth practice friendship, care-giving, and outreach and are supported by ministry training and caring adults.

**Asset 30. Establish Adult-Youth Mentoring:** Adults engage youth in the Christian faith and life supported by informed leadership.

**Asset 31. Participate in Training:** Youth and adults are equipped for ministry in an atmosphere of high expectations.

**Asset 32. Possesses Vibrant Faith:** Youth and adult leaders possess and practice a vital and informed Christian faith.

**Asset 33. Provides Competent Adult Leaders:** Adults foster authentic relationships and utilize effective practices in youth ministry with a clear vision strengthened by training and support.

### Adult Leadership

The adult leaders in youth ministry are women and men of mature faith. They are aware of the presence and activity of a living God in their lives and practicing faith in their daily lives. Adult leaders have a real sense that God is guiding them in daily life. Their thinking is informed by substantive understandings of God as reflected in Scripture and their faith traditions. Moreover, this awareness and understanding of God has a central place in their life's direction, their speaking, and their decision-making, leading them to be more morally responsible and socially conscious. Their faith forms the substance and sets the tone of youth ministry practices. They live their faith both at church and in the community, carrying in their lives manifold indications that God is present in their lives and influential in their decisions.

The faith of adult leaders in youth ministry is reflected in six significant scales from the survey findings:

Faith Characteristics of Adult Leaders (9 = highest score)	Adult Leader Rating
God Consciousness	8.57
Moral Responsibility	8.06
Centrality of Faith	7.47
Theological Competence	6.70
Social Responsibility	6.56
Bible Reading	5.58

Adult leaders form trusted relationships with young people and their parents as evidenced in the high scores from the survey findings:

Relational Characteristics of Adult Leaders (9 = highest score)	Adult Leader Rating
Positive Relationship with Youth	7.07
Youth Workers' Relationship with Parents	6.93

A systematic plan for training adult youth workers is a vitally important part of youth ministry, no matter the size of congregation or the number of leaders. Effective adult youth leaders are the result of intentional efforts at recruiting, training, and encouraging adults with the requisite gifts willing to give of themselves to ministry. There is a strong relationship between effective adult leaders and the training provided in youth ministry as identified in the survey findings:

Training of Adult Leaders (9 = highest score)	Adult Leader Rating
Adult Worker Satisfaction	6.82
Adult Worker's Creativity	6.72
Effectiveness of Training	5.85
Training Emphasis	5.12
Training of Adult Youth Workers	5.52

A distinctive characteristic of the adult leaders in the study is their dedication and long-tenured service. Adult leaders who serve for longer periods of time seem to be an important positive factor in the faith maturity of youth.

### Youth Leadership

One of the significant discoveries in the study was the large numbers of young people in leadership. Congregations, large and small, intentionally involve youth in leadership. They develop youth leaders, share real responsibilities, and delegate tasks. They encourage young people in leadership by providing resources and training throughout the life and ministries of their congregations.

Young people lead congregational activities: teaching classes, guiding worship, serving on committees, and helping with programs and events. As a result, these young people mature in their faith, develop important leadership skills, and are drawn more deeply into the life of the congregation. These youth scored significantly higher than their peers on a scale called "Leadership Development Activities" which measures the prevalence of congregational leadership training and the levels of leadership participation by youth. Young people who are apprenticed into leadership are more likely to develop more mature levels of faith. Congregations develop

strategies for discovering and utilizing young people's strengths and spiritual gifts

Youth lead through expressions of faith and servant witness. They speak privately and publically about their faith with others in the congregation. They bring their friends to worship, Bible studies, youth activities, mission trips, retreats, and youth events. Younger youth watch their older peers and learn from their example. Congregations benefit from this witness of young people—young people lead others in the church to greater engagement in ministry.

Young people in the study are given opportunities to exercise their gifts and talents in worship, education, music and service. They are considered as able and gifted as the adults in the congregation. Many congregations utilize Bible studies around spiritual giftedness and gift inventories as a framework for identifying young peoples' gifts and strengths. Identifying these young peoples' gifts and apprenticing them into leadership begins in the early grades and continues through high school.

Youth also lead through relationships with their peers. Many of the churches in the study have embedded a sense of responsibility for mentoring the young into the culture of the congregation. High school youth are apprenticed into leadership by serving as mentors, small group co-leaders, and big brothers and sisters to their younger counterparts.

They often serve as team leaders in their youth ministries. As young people lead youth ministry activities, adults are guiding, mentoring and coaching.

## Conclusion

The EYM congregations present a portrait of the strong impact faith communities can have on the faith and lives of young people when churches set their minds to fully enfranchise young people in their life and ministry. When pastors, congregational leaders, parents and adult youth leaders work together to promote real commitment to young people as full members of the body of Christ and carry that commitment across the life and mission of the entire congregation, teenagers mature in faith and grow to respect and love their church. The EYM study demonstrates how age-level youth ministry and ministries with family are dependent upon and greatly enhanced by congregations setting young people and youth ministry as one of its essential priorities. If a congregation is not willing to make this commitment, youth and youth ministry will always be tangential and second rate. Congregational commitment to young people is essential for effective ministry with youth.



For more information about the Exemplary Youth Ministry Project go to [www.exemplarym.com](http://www.exemplarym.com) and [www.luthersem.edu/exemplary](http://www.luthersem.edu/exemplary)

## Exemplary Youth Ministry Webinars

Join us for an online seminar presented by the Center for Children, Youth and Family Ministry at Luther Seminary

Learn the basics about the ground-breaking study of exemplary youth ministries under the leadership of Dr. Roland Martinson of Luther Seminary:

- the key aspects of a mature Christian faith
- the Faith Assets of congregational youth ministry
- the role of leadership in creating a culture for developing mature Christian young people

You will not only learn about the results of the EYM study, but you'll hear stories from leaders within these congregations. You will discover how all congregations can be places where the faith of young people is nurtured to maturity.

### Winter 2010 Webinars Schedule

January 28, 11 am CST • February 2, 1 pm CST • February 11, 11am CST  
Registration is limited to six people per session, so sign up today!

Cost: \$45 (\$25 for current seminary students)

Three easy ways to register! Online at [www.luthersem.edu/exemplary](http://www.luthersem.edu/exemplary)  
OR phone at 651.523.1772 OR contact Tom Schwolert at [tschwolert001@luthersem.edu](mailto:tschwolert001@luthersem.edu).

Dates for Spring 2010 are on the way.



# Faith Assets™ Assessment Tool

The Faith Assets can provide a common language to involve all members of the congregation in discovering their role in the lives of young people. Use this assessment tool to reflect on the **priority** and **practice** of the 44 Faith Assets in the life of your congregation and youth ministry. The Assessment Tool can be used with church staff, key leadership, and/or leadership councils to conduct an overall assessment of the congregation's impact on young people. It can be used by the youth ministry team, as well church staff and key leaders, to assess the effectiveness of the youth ministry effort. This tool is best used in group settings where there can be discussion and shared analysis. Begin by giving people time to complete the assessment individually. Then, use the following process to share reflections and analysis, and plan for improvement in each of the four asset groupings.

## Assessment Process

1. Select your first Faith Asset grouping for analysis: 1) Congregational Faith and Qualities, 2) Youth Ministry Qualities, 3) Family/Household Faith, or 4) Leadership.
2. Develop a profile of current practices and activities for this Faith Asset grouping: *How does our congregation (as a whole community, as youth ministry, and/or as leaders) promote these Faith Assets?*
3. Develop a composite score of the group's assessment of the **priority** of the Faith Assets in this grouping.
4. Discuss the reasons for people's ratings using the following questions: a) *Is this an accurate picture of our congregation's priorities in this asset area?* b) *Why do we believe it is accurate or inaccurate?* c) *Should a particular asset be a higher priority than it currently is?*
5. Develop a composite score of the group's assessment of the **practice** of the Faith Assets in this grouping.
6. Discuss the reasons for people's ratings using the following questions: a) *Is this an accurate rating of our congregation's practices in this asset area?* b) *Why do we believe our rating is accurate or inaccurate?* c) *How does our rating compare with the quality and scope of our specific activities for these Faith Assets? Which assets do we need to develop more fully?*
7. Identify the Faith Assets in this grouping that your congregation needs to make a higher priority and/or develop more effective practices.
8. Plan for improvement to strengthen the Faith Assets that you have identified as important areas for growth: 1) brainstorm potential strategies to develop the Faith Asset, 2) select one or more strategies for action, and 3) develop an action plan with implementation steps, budget, leadership, and dates for completion.

## Part 1. Congregational Faith & Qualities

Priority 1=low, 5 = high	Congregational Faith	Practice 1=low, 5=high
1 2 3 4 5	1. <b>God's Living Presence:</b> The congregation possesses a sense of God's living presence in community, at worship, through study, and in service.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	2. <b>Centrality of Faith:</b> The congregation recognizes and participates in God's sustaining and transforming life and work.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	3. <b>Emphasizes Prayer:</b> The congregation practices the presence of God as individuals and community through prayer and worship.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	4. <b>Focus on Discipleship:</b> The congregation is committed to knowing and following Jesus Christ.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	5. <b>Emphasizes Scripture:</b> The congregation values the authority of Scripture in its life and mission.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	6. <b>Centrality of Mission:</b> The congregation consistently witnesses, serves and promotes moral responsibility, and seeks justice.	1 2 3 4 5

Priority 1=low, 5 = high	Congregational Qualities	Practice 1=low, 5=high
1 2 3 4 5	7. <b>Supports Youth Ministry:</b> Youth and ministry with young people are high priorities for the congregation.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	8. <b>Demonstrates Hospitality:</b> The congregation values and welcomes all people, especially youth.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	9. <b>Strives for Excellence:</b> The congregation sets high standards, evaluates, and engages in continuous improvement.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	10. <b>Encourages Thinking:</b> The congregation welcomes questions and reflection on faith and life.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	11. <b>Creates Community:</b> The congregation reflects high quality personal and group relationships.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	12. <b>Encourages Support Groups:</b> The congregation engages members in study, conversation, and prayer about faith in daily life.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	13. <b>Promotes Worship:</b> The congregation expands and renews spirit-filled, uplifting worship.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	14. <b>Fosters Ethical Responsibility:</b> The congregation encourages individual and social moral responsibility.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	15. <b>Promotes Service:</b> The congregation sponsors outreach, service projects, and cultural immersions both locally and globally.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	16. <b>Demonstrates Effective Practices:</b> The congregation engages in a wide variety of ministry practices and activities.	1 2 3 4 5
	<b>Youth Involvement in the Congregation</b>	
1 2 3 4 5	17. <b>Participate in the Congregation:</b> Youth are engaged in a wide spectrum of congregational relationships and practices.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	18. <b>Assume Ministry Leadership:</b> Youth are invited, equipped and affirmed for leadership in congregational activities.	1 2 3 4 5

## Part 2. Youth Ministry Qualities

Priority 1=low, 5 = high	Youth Ministry Qualities	Practice 1=low, 5=high
1 2 3 4 5	19. <b>Establishes a Caring Environment:</b> Youth Ministry provides multiple nurturing relationships and activities resulting in a welcoming atmosphere of respect, growth, and belonging.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	20. <b>Develops Quality Relationship:</b> Youth Ministry develops authentic relationships among youth and adults establishing an environment of presence and life engagement.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	21. <b>Focus on Jesus Christ:</b> Youth ministry's mission, practices, and relationships are inspired by the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	22. <b>Considers Life Issues:</b> Youth ministry is values and addresses the full range of young people's lives.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	23. <b>Uses Many Approaches:</b> Youth ministry intentionally and creatively employs multiple activities appropriate to the ministry's mission and context.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	24. <b>Organized Well:</b> Youth ministry engages participants and leaders in long range planning, implementation, evaluation and innovation in an atmosphere of high expectations.	1 2 3 4 5

## Part 3. Family / Household Faith

Priority 1=low, 5 = high	Family / Household Faith	Practice 1=low, 5=high
1 2 3 4 5	25. <b>Possess Strong Parental Faith:</b> Parents possess and practice a vital and informed faith.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	26. <b>Promotes Family Faith Practices:</b> Parents engage youth and the whole family in conversations, prayer, bible reading, and service that nurture faith and life.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	27. <b>Reflects Family Harmony:</b> Family members' expressions of respect and love create an atmosphere promoting faith.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	28. <b>Equips Parents:</b> The congregation offers instruction and guidance that nurture parental faith and equips parents for nurturing faith at home.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	29. <b>Fosters Parent-Youth Relationships:</b> The congregation offers parent-youth activities that strengthen parent-youth relationships.	1 2 3 4 5

## Part 4. Leadership

Priority 1=low, 5 = high	Leadership of the Pastor	Practice 1=low, 5=high
1 2 3 4 5	30. <b>Spiritual Influence:</b> The pastor knows and models the transforming presence of God in life and ministry.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	31. <b>Interpersonal Competence:</b> The pastor builds a sense of community and relates well with adults and youth.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	32. <b>Supports Youth Ministry:</b> The pastor understands, guides, and advocates for youth ministry.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	33. <b>Supports Leaders:</b> The pastor affirms and mentors youth and adults leading youth ministry.	1 2 3 4 5
	<b>The Leadership of the Youth Minister</b>	
1 2 3 4 5	34. <b>Provides Competent Leadership:</b> The youth minister demonstrates superior theological, theoretical, and practical knowledge and skill in leadership.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	35. <b>Models Faith:</b> The youth minister is a role model reflecting a living faith for youth and adults.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	36. <b>Mentors Faith Life:</b> The youth minister assists adult leaders and youth in their faith life both one-on-one and in groups.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	37. <b>Develops Teams:</b> The youth minister reflects a clear vision and attracts gifted youth and adults into leadership	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	38. <b>Knows Youth:</b> The youth minister knows youth and the changes in youth culture and utilizes these understandings in ministry.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	39. <b>Establishes Effective Relationships:</b> The youth minister enjoys effective relationships with youth, parents, volunteers, and staff.	1 2 3 4 5
	<b>Youth and Adult Leadership</b>	
1 2 3 4 5	40. <b>Equip for Peer Ministry:</b> Youth practice friendship, care-giving, and outreach supported by training and caring adults.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	41. <b>Establish Adult-Youth Mentoring:</b> Adults engage youth in the Christian faith and life supported by informed leadership.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	42. <b>Participate in Training:</b> Youth and adults are equipped for ministry in an atmosphere of high expectations.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	43. <b>Posses Vibrant Faith:</b> Youth and adult leaders possess and practice a vital and informed faith.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	44. <b>Competent Adult Volunteers:</b> Adults foster authentic relationships and effective practices in youth ministry with a clear vision strengthen by training and support.	1 2 3 4 5