

# UPDATE

**UPDATE - 2003**

- How important is youth ministry?
- Frequency of youth ministry
- What about Pathfinders?

*John Hancock Center for Youth and Family Ministry-La Sierra University and the North American Division Office of Education*

**Number 11 — Valuegenesis<sup>2</sup> information you can use**

**July, 2003**

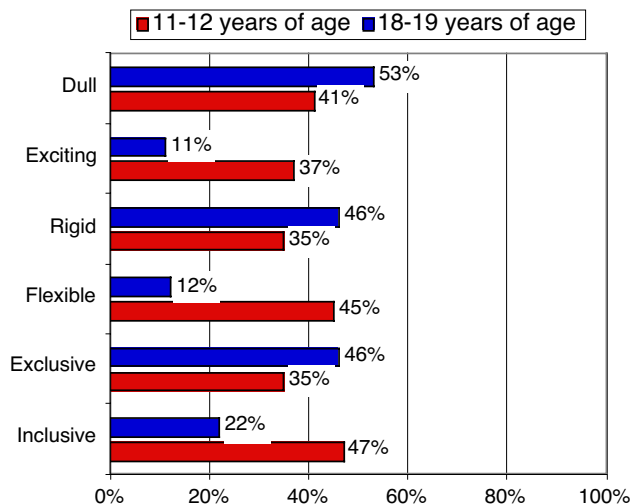
## How important is youth ministry?

George Gecowets, Manager of the Council of Logistics Management, says, "Children without values are like a cloakroom without hooks." Most of us learn our values at home. Our parents teach us right from wrong, but sometimes our grandparents or an exceptional teacher make such an impact. In the long list of influences on Christian youth, pastors, youth leaders, conference youth directors, local youth workers, and youth pastors are often seen as significant others in this process of valuemaking.

We've invited Barry Gane, D.Min., professor of youth ministry at the Theological Seminary at Andrews University to contribute to this **UPDATE** and focus on the power of youth ministry. Dr. Gane has written our chapter on youth ministry impact in our new book, *Ten Years Later: A Study of Two Generations*—our look at the *Valuegenesis* data in depth over the past ten years. But we thought you might like to hear what can be said about the impact of this special ministry on the youth of the church, and in so doing, you'll catch a glimpse of what's in store for you in our forthcoming book.

First, let's look at how young people view their church. The older students tend to see their church as exclusive, rigid, and seem to be bored with the whole approach to worship. In the *Valuegenesis* re-

### How does the church shape up?



search there are just over 10% who would rate the church as exciting, while the majority view it as dull. And while this may not be news to the myriad of youth workers in the church, it is still a cause of concern.

In addition, the older youth feel that it is more difficult to be themselves in church and they seek to separate themselves from their parent's views of church itself.

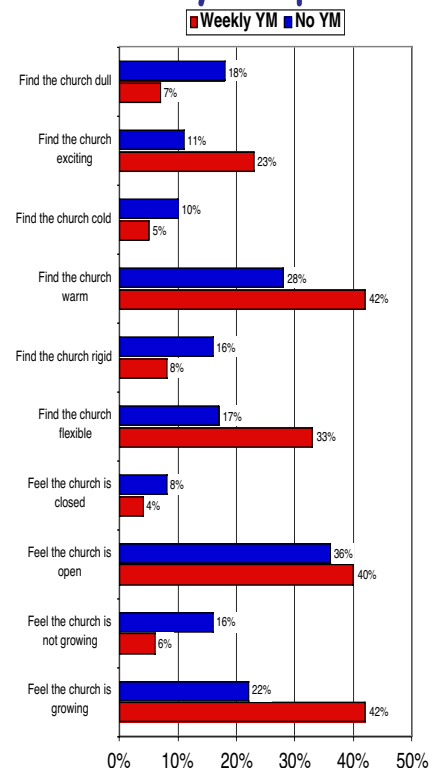
One nice thing about this kind of research is our ability to see what impact ministry has on the spiritual lives of youth. If we include youth ministry in the formula and ask the same questions, dividing the responses into those who have youth ministry and those who don't, we get some surprising results.

## Frequency of Youth Ministry

Take a close look at the major differences between these two groups. The differences are mostly marked in the areas of their perception of growth—flexibility, warmth and excitement. Even if the same pastor had the same program running in two difference churches but in one he had a youth ministry program being offered, he would have youth who were more positive about what the church is offering, just based on the amount of ministry they had been exposed to during their lives.

One dramatic result shows that in the area of seeing the church as exciting, there is a 200% increase in that perception. Most churches who have a youth ministry pro-

### Youth Ministry Perception

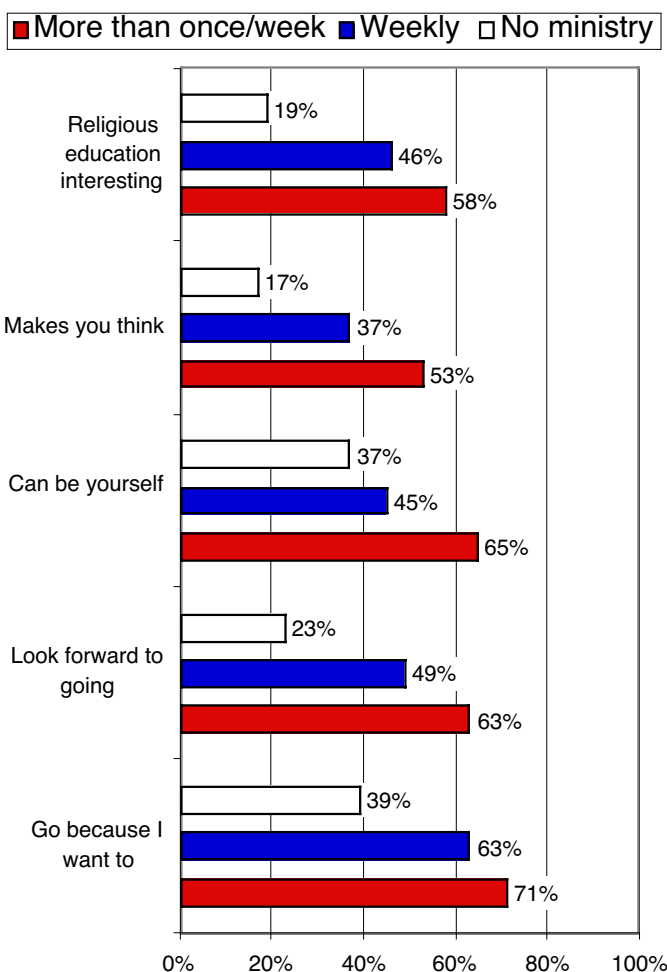


gram are out of necessity more flexible, and this does not go unnoticed by the youth in the church.

## More ministry—better results!

If we do more ministry, do we get a better response from the youth of the church? Perhaps we could say it this way: would students who are receiving ministry that is especially targeted and designed for them actually want to have more to do with the church?

### Attitude towards the church



As you can see, we can give a resounding “yes” to those questions! Those youth who attend churches where no youth ministry is available do not look forward to going to church and do not as a whole go because they want to. These same students find the religious education program of the church uninteresting, and only 17% feel it makes them think. Could these students be on the fast-track out of the church? Let’s hope not.

## The importance of the pastor

Some 45% see their pastors as significant and important in the development of their own faith life. And

when the church has a youth ministry running one time per week, this figure rises to 62% and increases still further to almost three-quarters of the group examined, to some 72% when their local congregation has a ministry to and for their youth more than once a week. But what about the other aspects of ministry?

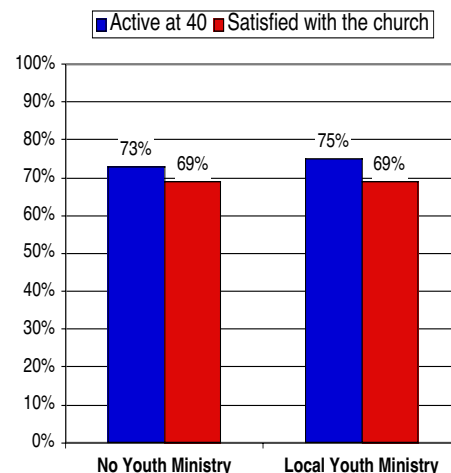
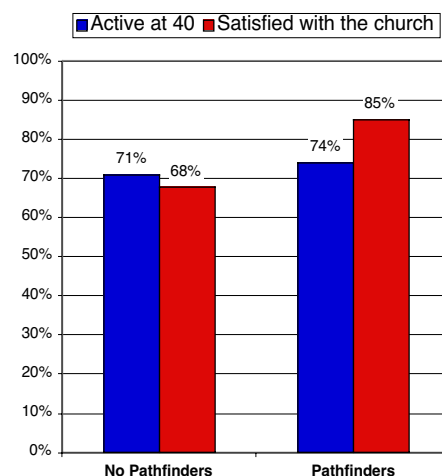
## Pathfinders and ministry

We asked the students in our survey if they planned to be active when they were forty years of age and if they were satisfied with their church. We compared both churches that have a Pathfinder club with those that don’t, and in addition, compared those with no local youth ministry and those that did have one. In the perception of the students, their answers are revealing about their commitment to the church based on the kind and degree of ministry they have. The Pathfinder question surveyed a younger group of youth, while the questions on ministry covered a broader age range. Their answers were revealing about the importance of these ministries in the local church.

Other questions shared more significant insights into local youth ministry’s effectiveness. For example, when we asked the youth if their faith growth (development) was impacted by youth ministry, the 69% who were satisfied with the church moved to some 80% for those who say this ministry affects their faith life “very much.”

When asking those in the Pathfinder category, only 50% claimed it impacted their faith development “very much.”

This data simply goes to show that especially these types of ministries are important, and equally so, the need for trained leaders to facilitate these ministries in the local churches in our denomination. Renewed effort must be taken to see that every congregation in the North American Division has an active Pathfinder program and a creative youth ministry team.



PLACE YOUR ORDER NOW and READ ALL ABOUT IT

The Book: Ten Years Later: A Study of Two Generations will be available later this summer, if you want to reserve yours at a 15% discount now, email— [hcyfm@lasierra.edu](mailto:hcyfm@lasierra.edu)