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THE ACCURACY OF YOUTH MINISTERS' CONCEPTION
OF THE LASTING FAITH TENDENCY OF YOUTH

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Wesley Allen Sirles
May 2009

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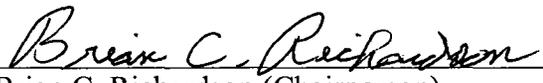
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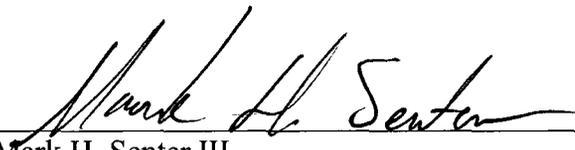
THE ACCURACY OF YOUTH MINISTERS' CONCEPTION
OF THE LASTING FAITH TENDENCY OF YOUTH

Wesley Allen Sirles

Read and Approved by:



Brian C. Richardson (Chairperson)



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Date May 15, 2009

This work is dedicated to future generations
of youth ministers who will impact
the lasting faith of students.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	viii
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
PREFACE.....	xii
Chapter	
1. RESEARCH CONCERN	1
Introduction to the Research Problem	3
Needed Research in Youth Ministry	4
Research Purpose	6
Delimitations	6
Choosing Kentucky and South Carolina	7
Research Questions	8
Terminology.....	8
Procedural Overview	11
Research Assumptions	12
2. PRECEDENT LITERATURE	13
A Case for Church Involvement	17
A Biblical Case	18
Outside Support	22

Chapter	Page
Lasting Faith	23
Adolescence	25
Spiritual Influences on Adolescents	29
Parents	31
Peers	33
Other Significant Adults	34
Church Involvement	36
Miscellaneous Factors	37
Spiritual Influences Conclusion	38
Spiritual Influences on Young Adults	39
Wesley Black’s Study	41
Youth Ministry Models	43
Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry	46
Congregational Youth Ministry	50
Family-Based Youth Ministry	53
Contemplative Youth Ministry	59
Conclusion to Youth Ministry Models	64
Profile of the Current Study	66
3. METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN	70
Research Question Synopsis	71
Design Overview	71
Population	72
Sample and Delimitations of the Sample	73
Limitations of Generalization	73

Chapter	Page
Instrumentation	73
Procedures	78
4. ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS	81
Compilation Protocol	81
Characteristics of the Samples	83
Student Demographics	85
Matched Youth Ministers and Youth	90
Preliminary Analysis	91
Factor Analysis	91
Internal Consistency Reliability	94
Sample Distribution	95
LFS Relationships to the Four Domains of Influence	99
Research Question 1 – Discipleship and Spiritual Depth	101
Research Question 2 – Family Influences	102
Research Question 3 – Mentoring and Intergenerational Influences	103
Research Question 4 – Relationships Influences	103
Research Questions 1-4 Summary	104
Research Question 5 – Comparison of Youth Ministers and Youth	105
Demographic Significance	108
Non-significant Demographics	108
Significant Demographics	109
Evaluation of the Research Design	116
Sample Sizes	117

Chapter	Page
Survey Analysis	119
5. CONCLUSIONS	121
Research Purpose and Questions	121
Conclusions from Research Questions 1-4 Findings	122
Conclusions from Research Question 5 Findings	126
Conclusions from Significant Demographics Findings	129
Research Implications	133
Research Applications	138
Youth Ministers' Insight	138
Domains of Influence	141
Research Limitations	149
Further Research	149
Appendix	Page
1. CORRESPONDENCE REGARDING SURVEY PARTICIPATION	153
2. LASTING FAITH SCALE	157
REFERENCE LIST	163

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CYFM	Center for Youth and Family Ministry
FJYA	Faith Journey of Young Adults
KBC	Kentucky Baptist Convention
LFS	Lasting Faith Scale
NSYR	National Study of Youth and Religion
RQ	Research Question
SBC	Southern Baptist Convention
SCBC	South Carolina Baptist Convention
YTN	Youth Transition Network

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Lasting Faith Scale subscales	75
2. LFS factor coefficients	92
3. LFS reliability statistic (n=191)	95
4. Initial student sample skewness	95
5. Corrected student LFS distribution	96
6. Pearson correlations between the LFS subscales	100
7. Pearson correlations between LFS subscales and corrected total LFS	100
8. Discipleship and spiritual depth items	101
9. Family influence items	102
10. Mentoring and intergenerational influences items	103
11. Peer influences items	104
12. Paired samples correlations	106
13. Paired samples t-tests	106
14. Independent samples t-tests	107
15. T-tests by student gender	109
16. Pearson correlation with student age	109
17. ANOVA by parents' marital status	110
18. Post hoc pairwise comparison – parents' marital status	110
19. ANOVA by parent with whom student lives	111

Table	Page
20. Post hoc pairwise comparison – parent with whom student lives	112
21. ANOVA by parent with whom student most identifies	113
22. Post hoc pairwise comparison – parent with whom student most identifies	113
23. ANOVA by parent student respects most in spiritual matters	114
24. Post hoc pairwise comparison – parent student respects most in spiritual matters	115
25. ANOVA by how student identifies with Jesus Christ	116
26. Post hoc pairwise comparison – how student identifies with Jesus Christ	116

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Youth minister population and sample	84
2. Student participation in the LFS	85
3. Student gender	86
4. Student age distribution	86
5. Parents' marital status	87
6. Students' living arrangements	88
7. Parent students most identify with	88
8. Parent students most respect in spiritual matters	89
9. Students' identification with Jesus Christ	90
10. Youth ministers' students completing the LFS	90
11. Negatively skewed LFS distribution	96
12. Overall LFS distribution after correction	97
13. Discipleship and spiritual depth subscale after correction	97
14. Family influence subscale distribution after correction	98
15. Mentoring and intergenerational influences subscale after correction	98
16. Peer influences subscale after correction	99

PREFACE

Four years ago, when I began this program, I could not envision arriving at this point in time. By God's grace, coupled with much encouragement and prayer, I celebrate not just the completion, but also the process itself. Dr. Brian Richardson, my dissertation chairperson, has provided indispensable insight and encouragement along the way. He has gone to bat for me on more than one occasion. The other member of my committee, Dr. Mark Senter, has also given valuable insight that has helped to refine this work.

I am extremely grateful for Cohort 08. Not only have they struggled through this process alongside me, but they have also encouraged and helped me in more ways than I can describe. I know that I have been on the receiving end of this relationship far more than on the giving end. I long to sit with them around the table at Buca di Beppo again soon.

To Dr. Wes Black, I am thankful for research ideas and especially for the Lasting Faith Scale and his permission to use it for this project. I hope my study will enhance his continued investigation into this vital issue.

My close partners in this project have been Joe Ball at the Kentucky Baptist Convention and Phil Charpie and Steve Rohrlack at the South Carolina Baptist Convention. I could have never gathered my data without their help. I am especially thankful to the youth pastors and students in those states who participated in the survey.

Linda Deacon has done the hard work with the statistics for this project and has patiently taught me what her analysis means (several times). I would not have had a

paper worth turning in if it were not for Ronda and Ted Sloan and Elizabeth Davis and their proofreading. I am so grateful for their willingness to read this more than once.

Throughout my life, I have been blessed with a consistent stream of encouragement from my dad and mom, Urb and Martha Sirles. This part of my journey has been no different. I am very thankful that they are eternally positive and that I can always count on the fact that they are praying for me.

My best friend, Lee Gambrell, is not even aware of how much he has challenged me to keep plodding along through this process. Most of his encouragement has come from the example of his life.

My wife, Cindy, is incredible! I can tell from her look that she believes in me even when I do not. My boys, Austin, Spencer, and Pete, are inspirations to me. They have always loved me unconditionally and have constantly made me feel that I could accomplish anything God called me to do. My family has been patient with me when I had to sacrifice time with them periodically to work on this dissertation. I love them so much!

Finally, without Jesus Christ, none of this would matter. His Spirit is the real power behind any good that comes from this research. My prayer is that he will use it to enhance the church's ministry to students. This dissertation is for him and them.

Wesley Allen Sirles

Lexington, Kentucky

May 2009

CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH CONCERN

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb 10:25; all Scripture quotations are from the NIV)

If any Christian is missing in a local congregation, that church is unable to fulfill completely, in the best possible way, the mission to which it has been called. The Apostle Paul called the church the body of Christ and emphasized each member's vital function when he wrote, "But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body" (1 Cor 12:18-20). A segment of the population seems to be in short supply in local churches. Powell and Kubiak report that different denominations estimate that they lose between 65% and 94% of their young people after high school (Powell and Kubiak 2005, 51). Many congregations are impacted by the loss of young people from active participation after high school. Studies have been conducted regarding the spiritual influences of adolescents and young adults and the factors that relate to their ongoing involvement in the local church after they leave the youth group (i.e., Barna 2001; Black 2006; Dudley 1999; Lamport 1990; Smith and Denton 2005).

The focus of this exodus from the local church is on young people at or near the end of high school. Because of this, various models of youth ministry have been proposed to deal with this fallout (i.e., Dean 2004; DeVries 2004a; Duerksen 2001; Fields

1998; Strommen, Jones, and Rahn 2001; Yaconelli 2007). Regardless of the model, the trend among these researchers, educators, and youth ministers is moving away from what has been dubbed an entertainment-centered approach that seems to have been prevalent during the growth of professional youth ministry. Strommen, Jones, and Rahn acknowledge this: “The focus of traditional youth ministry programming, on the other hand, is entertainment, usually in the form of one speaker and a large audience – a model that attracts youth with a heavy fare of fun activities” (Strommen, Jones, and Rahn 2001, 67). The newer models move away from the attempt to draw large crowds at all costs to focusing on the spiritual growth and development of each individual young person. Because of this focus, much more personal contact and attention is required in the discipleship process (Dean 2004; DeVries 2004a; Duerksen 2001; Fields 1998; Strommen, Jones, and Rahn 2001; Yaconelli 2007). To accomplish this focus of discipleship, more adults and student leaders are needed instead of the entire program being lead by only the youth pastor.

However, a number of questions come with these new approaches to youth ministry. Do these models really impact the ministry of youth workers today? Is there one model that will work best for everyone, or do different models or blends of these models work best in different situations? Are youth ministers today really interested in the long-term spiritual growth of their students, or are they simply interested in what happens with them while they are in the youth group? Are they familiar with what current, specific research has found to have the most significant impact on the spiritual lives of adolescents and what keeps them connected to the local church years after they leave high school? How do they evaluate the tendency of their students to stay active in the church after high school? These questions bring us to the reason for this study.

Introduction to the Research Problem

The New Testament is clear that Christians are to meet together as the local church, and fulfillment of their role as the body of Christ depends upon this practice (Heb 10:24-25). God purposely gave followers of Christ different spiritual gifts. Because of this, many of the instructions for believers and the church can only be carried out in concert with one another (1 Cor 12:7-12). The mission and ministry of the local church are hindered whenever any member does not fulfill his or her role in the body. So when a significant portion of any group within the congregation is absent, the church should be concerned enough to address its absence.

Legitimate questions arise from this dilemma of the exodus of young people from active participation in church near the end of or after high school. Will they return? Are they lost to the church forever? How does their leaving affect the ongoing ministry of the local congregation? Because of this issue, some may think that this segment of the population is generally disillusioned with the church. According to Smith, Faris, and Denton in a nationwide study conducted by the National Study of Youth and Religion, "Only about 15 percent appear to be alienated from religion, a number comparable to the percentage of U.S. adults who are alienated from religion" (Smith, Faris, and Denton 2004, [publications/docs/Alienation.pdf](#)). Although the authors give no clear definition or degree of alienation, they do differentiate between this and merely being disengaged. Alienation seems to refer to some level of negative feelings toward religion, whereas being disengaged refers to merely ceasing to participate.

Barna Research Group agrees that young adults remain "spiritual" and a majority of them (78%) say they are Christians. But the group's study reveals the disconnection with the local church by finding that "the most potent data regarding

disengagement is that a majority of twentysomethings – 61% of today’s young adults – had been churched at one point during their teen years but they are now spiritually disengaged (i.e., not actively attending church, reading the Bible, or praying). Only one-fifth of twentysomethings (20%) have maintained a level of spiritual activity consistent with their high school experiences” (Barna Group 2006, UpdateID=245). While young adults may not be alienated from or antagonistic toward organized religion, their diminished participation and absence is very obvious.

LifeWay Research also points to this decline: “In 1980, more than 100,000 young adults were baptized in Southern Baptist churches. In 2005, slightly more than 60,000 young adults were baptized in SBC churches; a number drastically lower with the United States population climbing above 300 million” (Lovelace 2006, lwc/article_main_page/0%2C1703%2CA%25253D164481%252526M%25253D200906%2C00.html?).

There are also young people who do stay connected to the local church, but it may not be the same church in which they spent their high school years. It could be a church located near their college or work or even a different church of their own choosing in the same town where they grew up. What keeps these young adults attached to a local congregation? Are there common characteristics among them that can be discovered and possibly even reproduced? The reasons for continued church involvement may be even more significant among those who, for whatever reason, connect with a church other than the one in which they spent their high school years.

Needed Research in Youth Ministry

Dan Lambert conducted a study of youth ministry educators to discover what was needed in youth ministry research. Responses from participants were gathered, coded and returned to participants for ranking. The top-ranked area for needed research

was “longitudinal studies on teen faith after youth group.” The third response in the ranking was, “What is the profile of a ministry whose students are most likely to remain active in the cause of Christ after HS?” (Lambert 2004, 87). The spiritual life of young people after they leave their high school youth group is of vital concern to those who train future youth pastors because of the long-term effect youth pastors will have on the lives of young people, extending beyond high school. If educators want to know about the protracted effects of youth ministry, it should also be important to ministry leaders who have a role to play in the lives of young people.

Discovering and understanding some of these common characteristics may assist local churches in addressing the fallout of these young adults, enabling congregations to develop ways to keep them involved. It may give a clearer focus to the type of spiritual training or level of involvement that is necessary to instill the desired values in students while they are still in high school that will prevent them from dropping out when they have the freedom to make their own choices about church participation.

In a study by Wesley Black, some of the reasons for church involvement and non-involvement of young adults have been explored (Black 2006). The synopsis of Black’s results is available on the Internet (<http://www.sltn.com/FJYA/Study/intro.htm>), and a more complete report of his study is available in the Spring 2006 issue of *The Journal of Youth Ministry*. Are youth ministers aware of this research and do they understand and share these same perspectives about why young people do or do not continue to participate in local churches? If they do not, then does the church have the understanding needed to address this issue adequately? Therefore, it is important to understand the factors involved in affecting long-term commitment to the local church among adolescents.

An important product of Black's research is the development of the Lasting Faith Scale (LFS), which measures the tendency of young people to demonstrate continued local church involvement after high school. Significant indicators were discovered in Black's research and other studies that yielded 30 items that have been tested for validity and reliability (Black 2008). This survey has been used during the reliability-testing phase of the instrument and by random youth groups, but not in a single, concentrated research project yet.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research was to use Wesley Black's Lasting Faith Scale (LFS) to compare the lasting faith tendency of youth (reflected by their LFS scores) with what their youth ministers believed would be their groups' LFS scores. LFS responses were also evaluated for the effects on scores of the four domains of influence – discipleship and spiritual depth; family; mentoring and intergenerational influences; and peer relationships.

Delimitations

To make an accurate assessment of the lasting faith tendency of youth and compare their LFS scores to what their youth ministers believed their groups would score, this research was delimited to Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) churches in Kentucky and South Carolina that employ full time youth ministers. Access to these ministers and churches was available through each state convention office.

One of the limitations of the generalizability of this study is that it might not be applicable to non-SBC churches. It also might not apply to churches that do not have professional youth ministers. It might not apply to churches outside of Kentucky and

South Carolina. However, this researcher believes that the variety of churches, youth ministers, and young people surveyed will help enhance understanding across a much broader range than just those in these two states. This study will also be replicable in other settings and with other types of churches.

Choosing Kentucky and South Carolina

For this research to be useful, it was imperative to target states that would provide ample opportunity to achieve adequate responses to the instrument being used. The researcher utilized known contacts at the Kentucky Baptist Convention (KBC) office in the initial stages of narrowing the research focus. In those consultations, the contact overseeing youth ministry for the state expressed sincere interest in the study and the desire to participate and provide assistance in contacting the full time youth pastors at KBC churches.

While searching for outside information on Black's Lasting Faith Scale (LFS), the researcher discovered an invitation to participate in Black's research in a newsletter entitled the *Church Staff Digest* (a South Carolina Baptist Convention publication) (<http://images.acswebnetworks.com/2013/1271/november2007csd.pdf>). The office responsible for the invitation was contacted. This research project was described, including the use of Black's LFS. The South Carolina Baptist Convention (SCBC) contact was very interested in participation. The youth ministry leader for the state offered assistance with contacting full time youth pastors in SCBC churches.

The SBC includes 39 state conventions since some states are combined in areas of the United States where SBC work is not as well established. Of these 39 state conventions, Kentucky and South Carolina are in the top ten in number of churches within the state convention. In the 2007 SBC Annual Report, Kentucky was reported as

having 2,448 SBC churches, placing it at number six on the list. South Carolina was shown to have 2,051 SBC churches, making it number nine (<http://sbcec.org/bor/2007/2007SBCAnnual.pdf>). Only nine states in the SBC have more than 2,000 churches. Six more have between 1,000 and 2,000, leaving 24 state conventions with fewer than 1,000 churches each. All but two of those have fewer than 500. Of the 43,953 churches numbered in the 2007 SBC Annual Report, 10.2% of them were in Kentucky and South Carolina. This evidence demonstrates that these states provided a solid base from which to conduct research focused on SBC churches.

Research Questions

The following questions were used to guide the gathering and analysis of data for this study:

1. What is the relationship of the lasting faith tendency of the youth respondents to their experience of discipleship and spiritual depth?
2. What is the relationship of the lasting faith tendency of the youth respondents to their family influence?
3. What is the relationship of the lasting faith tendency of the youth respondents to their mentoring and intergenerational influences?
4. What is the relationship of the lasting faith tendency of the youth respondents to their peer influences?
5. How do the Lasting Faith Scale (LFS) scores of the youth respondents compare with how their youth ministers believe their groups will score on the LFS?

Terminology

The following terms and definitions are offered for the clarification of their use in this research effort:

Adolescent. Adolescence is “the period of life between childhood and adulthood . . . [and] lasts from roughly 10 to 13 years of age and ends at 18 to 22 years of

age” (Santrock 1990, 28-29). This period of life can be further divided into early adolescence, typically 11 to 14 years of age, middle adolescence, 15 to 19 years of age, and late adolescence, from age 19 to adulthood (Rice and Dolgin 2002, 1). Recognizing that there can be a distinction between these terms, for the purpose of this study, the terms “youth,” “teenager” or “teen,” “young person,” and “student” will be considered synonymous with “adolescent.”

Church involvement. Church involvement refers to someone’s pattern of participation in a single local church. This is an ambiguous concept, since simple church attendance may not constitute genuine involvement in many definitions. Christian Smith considers regular participation to be two to three times a month or more (Smith and Denton 2005, 70). Wesley Black defines faithful church attendance as attending church services, youth group meetings, or Bible studies at least two times per month on average (Black 2008, 55). Therefore, this study will classify church involvement as attending church services, Bible studies, or meetings designed for young people at least two times per month. “Church participation” will be synonymous with “church involvement.”

Discipleship. Chuck Lawless writes, “Biblical discipleship is a *lifestyle* best described in Jesus’ words: ‘A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, *will be like his teacher*’ (Luke 6:40, emphasis added). . . . A disciple is a committed follower who seeks to model his life after his teacher” (Lawless 2002, 45). Discipleship in this study will refer to the process by which a person becomes a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. “Spiritual depth” will be synonymous with “discipleship.”

Intergenerational. An online dictionary defines “intergenerational” as “involving persons of different generations” (www.yourdictionary.com/

intergenerational). Throughout this paper, intergenerational will refer to the interaction between young people and older generations, specifically in the context of the local church.

Lasting faith. Wesley Black describes lasting faith as the propensity in young people to continue in faithful church involvement after high school (Black 2006, 19). For this study, the idea of lasting faith is also expressed in phrases such as “continued church involvement,” “ongoing church participation,” and “continued connection to the local church.”

Local church. Erickson defines a local church as a group of Christians who live and gather in a given geographical locality (Erickson 1992, 340). It must be within a reasonable driving distance for an individual to be able to participate regularly.

Mentoring. An online dictionary defines “mentor” as “a trusted counselor or guide” (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mentor). Therefore, throughout this paper, mentoring will refer to the relationship in which one person serves as a counselor or guide for another. Specifically, in this context, mentoring is viewed in light of the discipleship process (see definition of *Discipleship*).

Mutual discipleship. Lawson and Keehn define mutual discipleship as “holding each other accountable for faithful living” (Lawson and Keehn, articles.php5?type=2&cat=30&art_id=97). This study focuses on teenagers, so the term will refer to students taking responsibility for not only their own spiritual growth but for influencing other youth in ways that contribute to their lasting faith tendency, or spiritual depth.

Young adult. A young adult, for the purpose of this study, is synonymous with late adolescence as described above in the definition of *Adolescent* (Rice and Dolgin

2002, 1). This could range in age from 18 to 25. Other terms regularly used will be “young person” and “late adolescent.”

Youth minister. An online dictionary defines a “minister” as “anyone authorized to carry out or assist in the spiritual functions of a church” (www.yourdictionary.com/minister). A youth minister, in this study, refers to one to whom is given the responsibility to perform youth ministry (see *youth ministry* definition below). The terms “youth pastor” and “ministry leader” will be synonymous with this term throughout this paper.

Youth ministry. “Youth ministry is the purposive, determined, and persistent quest by both natural and supernatural means to expose, transmit, or otherwise share with adolescents God’s message of good news, which is central to the Christian faith. Its ultimate end is to cultivate a life of transformation of youth by the power of the Holy Spirit that they might be conformed to the revealed will of God as expressed in Scripture, and chiefly in the person of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Lampton 1996, 62). It will refer to local church ministry with middle and high school students.

Youth ministry model. “Model” is defined as “an example for imitation or emulation” (www.m-w.com/dictionary/model). Thus, given the definition for *youth ministry* above, a youth ministry model is a way of carrying out ministry to adolescents, or an approach to youth ministry, that is or can be emulated by others.

Procedural Overview

The Kentucky Baptist Convention (KBC) and the South Carolina Baptist Convention (SCBC) provided access to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) churches that employ full time youth ministers in their states. These youth ministers were contacted by e-mail from the state convention offices with a brief explanation of this

research project and an invitation to participate. (Appendix 1) The e-mail contained a link to the Lasting Faith Scale (LFS) Web site where youth pastors and their groups took the survey online. Youth pastors were asked to make the survey link available to their students via any means that would help achieve the best response.

The survey results were evaluated to discover the effects of the four domains of influence on students' LFS scores. Overall scores of youth ministers were also compared with overall student scores to determine if the surveyed youth ministers hold realistic views of their groups' tendency toward lasting faith.

Research Assumptions

The following assumptions underlie this study:

1. The youth ministers and youth surveyed in this research will be representative of youth ministers and youth from Southern Baptist churches in Kentucky and South Carolina.
2. Survey respondents will be open, honest, and accurate in responding to the items of the Lasting Faith Scale.
3. Involvement in a local church is a foundational component to positive Christian spiritual development.
4. Churches and ministry leaders are aware of the decline in church attendance among young people near the end of or after high school.
5. The Lasting Faith Scale is a valid and reliable instrument for measuring the tendency of young people to continue their church involvement after high school.

CHAPTER 2

PRECEDENT LITERATURE

This [“Why is the church losing so many young people?”] seems to occupy and continues to occupy the time and efforts of elders, preachers, Christians and parents in many congregations. Elaborate programs of education and recreation have been devised to answer the problem only to see subsequent generations depart from the faith, or take a very indifferent attitude towards Christianity. (Henderson 2001, 5)

The connection of Christians to the local church is crucial for the spiritual growth of the individual and for the local body of Christ to accomplish its intended mission (Eph 4:11-16). Yet the church continues to see many young people (especially late adolescents and young adults) leave local congregations in alarming numbers (Powell and Kubiak 2005, 51). Have many churches come to expect such fallout and thus become numb to this phenomenon?

At this stage of life, young people are very likely to undergo many changes. Robert Gribbon writes, “Transitional young adults, generally between ages eighteen and twenty-five, are the most mobile – in transition between school and work and moving from life with parents to life on their own. These *explorers* are open to experiments, to ideology, and to intense involvements. They are the least likely to attend church or synagogue regularly” (Gribbon 1990, 3). In an earlier study, Gribbon discovered a consistent drop in church involvement occurring in young adults, mainly between the ages of 18 and 24. In every case (based on 100 interviews), the point of departure from the church came when their parents stopped requiring them to go, when they moved away from home, or upon high school graduation (Gribbon 1982, 4).

Friedrich Schweitzer also comments about the drop in participation by this age group: “Empirical research on church members’ attitudes toward the church has shown that these attitudes change markedly during late adolescence or early adulthood. If one attempts to characterize the typical person who is likely to drop his or her church membership, the factor of age appears to be one of the most prominent characteristics. It is some time during the third decade of life that dropping out most often occurs or is at least considered a possible choice” (Schweitzer 2004, 65).

In 2003, The Barna Group published a report about the church attendance habits of young adults. The report states, “As teenagers, more than half attended church each week and more than 4 out of 5 (81%) had ever gone to a Christian church. That means that from high school graduation to age 25 there is a 42% drop in weekly church attendance and a 58% decline from age 18 to age 29” (Barna 2003, UpdateID=149).

There could be many reasons for this fallout. Bert Roebben writes that young people are at a stage of life where they do not feel like they fit in the adult world: “Young people do not feel at home in the church for the same reasons they do not feel so in society. They feel that, wherever they go, they are assessed by adult values and norms and, consequently, are not taken seriously enough in their own personal, moral, and existential development” (Roebben 1997, 343).

Over a period of eighteen months, Tom Bisset interviewed a number of people from Christian backgrounds who had chosen to “leave the faith.” From his informal survey, though not a scientific research project, Bisset poses four factors that cause people to turn their backs on their Christian beliefs. Some leave because of unanswered questions about their faith. Others feel their faith “isn’t working for them.” Some people leave because other things take precedence over their faith. And some exit because they never made that faith their own to begin with. Instead, they simply adopt the religious

practices and beliefs of those around them without internalizing those values (Bisset 1992, 22-23).

Powell and Kubiak underscore the magnitude of this issue of young people leaving the church: “Various denominations have estimated that between 65% and 94% of their high school students stop attending church after they graduate” (Powell and Kubiak 2005, 51). One possible reason given by these writers for this decline is that in many youth groups, the focus shifts from the older, established students to the newcomers in either middle school or high school in order to help them transition into the group. The older group members may begin to feel ignored and lose interest in participation. The main outcome of this study was the necessity for better preparing students to face life after high school. The authors conclude, “Based on the responses to our survey, the big three topics that seem to deserve special attention are developing new friendships in new contexts, how to live responsibly when you’re away from home for the first time, and how to find a new church or college ministry in which you can be both nurtured and challenged” (Powell and Kubiak 2005, 54).

LifeWay Research conducted a survey in 2007 with more than 1,000 adults ages 18-30 to discover reasons young people stop attending church. They found that “70 percent of young adults ages 23-30 stopped attending church regularly for at least a year between ages 18-22” (LifeWay 2007, [article_main_page/0%2C1703%2CA%25253D165949%252526M%25253D200906%2C00.html?](http://www.lifeway.com/article_main_page/0%2C1703%2CA%25253D165949%252526M%25253D200906%2C00.html?)). Their research showed that six of the top ten reasons for church dropout relate to life changes, such as leaving home and starting college or a job. The study also found relationships to be significant to church connection or disconnection. Brad Waggoner, vice president of research and ministry development at LifeWay, is quoted as saying, “Relationships are often the glue that keep people in church or serves as the attraction to begin attending again following a period of

absenteeism. Many people are deeply influenced by friends and loved ones” (LifeWay 2007, [article_main_page/0%2C1703%2CA%25253D165949%252526M%25253D200906%2C00.html?](#)).

The LifeWay study also discovered some reasons why young people do stay involved in church after high school. Sixty-five percent of respondents chose the response, “Church was a vital part of my relationship with God” and 58% chose “I wanted the church to help guide my decisions in everyday life” (LifeWay 2007, [article_main_page/0%2C1703%2CA%25253D165949%252526M%25253D200906%2C00.html?](#)).

This issue of helping young people stay connected to a local church is so critical that at least two organizations have been formed to assist churches and college ministries in dealing with the need. The Center for Youth and Family Ministry (CYFM) at Fuller Theological Seminary started the College Transition Project. The goal of this project is to identify the variables that help high school students transition well into college and then to use that information to provide resources for teens, parents, churches as they prepare for this transition. CYFM has discovered that there are some common qualities of a graduate who is likely to make a smooth transition to college life. These include having a Christian worldview, articulating the Christian story in one’s own language, being community minded, being involved in a small group, and having adult mentors (Powell 2008, [Where_Do_They_Go_Once_They_Graduate.html](#)).

The other group formed to aid in this transition is the Youth Transition Network (YTN). YTN is a coalition that includes Baptist Collegiate Ministries, LifeWay Research, The Assemblies of God, Campus Crusade for Christ, Youth for Christ InterVarsity, the Navigators, and others. Over a period of a year and a half YTN held open forum discussions with more than 500 high school students and interviews with 140

college students to discover the major issues for them in the transition from high school to college. College students consistently voiced three key issues that affected their transition: aloneness, making friends, and a desire to find a church but not knowing how. YTN has launched two Web sites to assist churches and students with this transition. The site for leaders is YouthTransitionNetwork.org and the site for students is LiveAbove.com. The student site has 5,400 ministries on over 3,000 campuses, so young people can make a connection before they even leave home (Schadt 2007, [listening_to_students_about_le_1.html](#)).

In light of this crucial issue of young people leaving the church after high school and because of the interest already exhibited in this subject, it is vital to explore the biblical foundation for church involvement as a necessity for all Christians and to make a brief review of literature concerning the nature of adolescence as a period of significant change for young people. This chapter will also survey current studies that give insight into the spiritual influences in the lives of adolescents and young adults, and will review youth ministry models proposed in recent writings by educators and practitioners.

A Case for Church Involvement

Is the exodus of young people from the church a serious concern to most church leaders? Many demonstrate that this is clearly an important focus as attention is given to developing new models of youth ministry designed to bring about a deeper and more lasting spiritual maturity (see *Youth Ministry Models* later in this chapter). This discipleship will grow out of and contribute to the ongoing connection of young people to the local church. It may be assumed that ministry leaders possess a thorough understanding of the value of church participation for all Christians. But those who must

address this defection must make a commitment to this goal of church involvement. The commitment to working toward a solution is preceded by an understanding of how participation of everyone in the body of Christ is critical at the local church level. There is clear biblical support for local church involvement in the pages of the New Testament, as will be established below.

A Biblical Case

When Jesus left this planet after His earthly ministry, death, and resurrection, He entrusted His ongoing mission to those who followed Him. He had no other plan. It is summarized in what is called the Great Commission: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:19-20). Those early disciples followed His instruction to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit. Shortly thereafter, a vibrant, growing church was evident to all who lived there (Acts 2:42-47).

Luke, in Acts 2, gives a capsule of the early church. George Eldon Ladd in speaking of that church writes, “One of the most striking elements in the life of the primitive churches was its sense of fellowship. ‘They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship’ (2:42). The several statements that the early Christians were ‘together’ (2:44, 47) designate the quality of their fellowship as much as their common assemblage. The early Christians were conscious of being bound together because they were together bound to Christ” (Ladd 1974, 350).

Being a Christian and being a part of the church appear to be synonymous in the New Testament. There does not even seem to be a question about whether one would be a member of the church once they decided to follow Christ. Ladd also wrote, “To be a

believer meant to share with other believers the life of the coming age, to be a believer in fellowship, to be in the *ekklesia*” (Ladd 1974, 351). That fellowship was a key element of the early church. It set those believers apart from the world around them in the way they interacted and cared for one another (Acts 4:32-35). Outsiders saw this characteristic clearly, as noted by C. A. Anderson Scott: “One of the most notable features in this eschatological people is that of fellowship (*koinonia*)” (Scott 1927, 158).

Much has been made of this common bond the members of the early church had. They met one another’s needs and provided encouragement and support during times of very intense persecution, both from religious and government authorities (Acts 3). Ladd insists that, although it may not take on the same form, this fellowship, or *koinonia*, was “an expression of the deep bond of Christian fellowship in the primitive community. The same sense of fellowship ought to assume other forms of expression in different historical situations” (Ladd 1974, 351).

The members of a local church share a unique relationship that is found nowhere else, according to Ladd: “This relationship exists between people because they share a common relationship to Christ (I Cor. 1:9). A bond exists between all who are in Christ that is unique and transcends all other human relationships” (Ladd 1974, 543). The Apostle Paul gave one of the most illustrative images for the church when he spoke of the body of Christ. About this illustration, Ladd writes, “The reason Paul draws upon the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ in Romans and Corinthians is, as already noted, to establish the proper relationship of Christians to each other. There is one body but it has many members, and these members differ greatly from one another” (Ladd 1974, 545). This very idea of a body assumes the necessity of every member for the local church to be completely functional. The church can only operate correctly with every

member involved, and each individual member can only function properly when connected to the larger body (1 Cor 12:14-20).

The benefits of this fellowship are not only manifested in the meeting of physical needs. Chuck Lawless writes that this fellowship is necessary for spiritual maturity in individual believers: “One of the goals of a healthy church is to ‘present every man complete in Christ’ (Col. 1:28), and genuine fellowship leads toward that goal. Believers who are affirmed, encouraged, loved, and supported are much more likely to march forward in Christian faithfulness when the Enemy strikes” (Lawless 2002, 172). Personal spiritual maturity is closely related to full participation in the fellowship of the local church.

The local church is evident in all of the Pauline letters as he addressed congregations in Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica. The letters that he addressed to individuals (Timothy, Titus, and Philemon) gave instructions for the local church or at least mentioned it. He gave them directions for corporate worship, leadership, teaching, and other things that could only be done in concert as a local congregation. The writer of Hebrews also stressed the critical nature of active participation in the church: “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb 10:24-25). Obviously, some had fallen out of active participation and the prompting was to return to consistent involvement. This encouragement is just as necessary in the life of every Christ-follower today.

In his study of Hebrews 10:19-25, Mark Allen Peters states that “the reader is encouraged to give thought to how to bring out the best in his or her fellow Christians. But this is best done in the context of the community gathering together for worship”

(Peters 1999, 63). Peters recounts the excuses some may make for not being involved in a local church and then offers a response in light of this passage. “I have time for God, but not for organized religion. I can be a believer without going to church. It is not what one believes, after all, but what one does that is important, right?” Hebrews will not allow us this false dichotomy. Believing and doing are intertwined. The place where they mix best is in worship.” He concludes, “Where circumstances allow, we must come together to worship because we are not complete as Christians if we do not regularly assemble with other Christians ‘to stir up one another to love and good works’ and ‘encourag[e] one another’ (RSV)” (Peters 1999, 64).

Finally, just a simple scan of what some have called the “one-another” verses demonstrates the necessity of ongoing church involvement: “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves” (Rom 12:10); “Live in harmony with one another” (Rom 12:16); “Accept one another” (Rom 15:7); “Instruct one another” (Rom 15:14); “Greet one another with a holy kiss” (Rom 16:16); “Agree with one another” (1 Cor 1:10); “Serve one another in love” (Gal 5:13); “Be patient, bearing with one another in love” (Eph 4:2); “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other” (Eph 4:32); “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” (Eph 5:19); “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph 5:21); “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another” (Col 3:13); “Teach and admonish one another with all wisdom” (Col 3:16); “Encourage one another and build each other up” (1 Thess 5:11); “Live in peace with each other” (1 Thess 5:13); “Try to be kind to each other and to everyone else” (1 Thess 5:15); “Spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Heb 10:24); “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other” (Jas 5:16); “Love one another deeply, from the heart” (1 Pet

1:22); “Live in harmony with one another” (1 Pet 3:8); “Offer hospitality to one another” (1 Pet 4:9); “Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another” (1 Pet 5:5).

No Christian can obey these instructions alone because each of these directions calls for the interaction of believers. Working together is required to accomplish the work of the local church, and every individual member is gifted by the Holy Spirit (Rom 12, 1 Cor 12) to fulfill a unique role. The biblical case for ongoing local church involvement for every Christian is undeniable.

Outside Support

The biblical basis for active participation in a local congregation has been established above, but there are also outside sources that validate church involvement as a positive and healthy practice for individuals. This section will be a concise survey of some of that material.

Church community is built on relationships (i.e., Rom 12, 1 Cor 12) and relationships are accepted as a vital part of the developmental process. James Fowler writes, “Where else in our age-stage segregated era do you have communities where three or four generations interact across age and stage barriers – with children sponsoring grand- and great-grandparent-aged adults and elders sponsoring children? What other communities are constituted as *ecologies of care* and *ecologies of vocation*, where people call forth and confirm each other’s gifts and giftedness for the service of God, and support and hold each other accountable in the use of those gifts?” (Fowler 1991, 149).

Christian Smith, in the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR), also discovered the value of church participation in the lives of young people. He writes, “Several decades of social scientific studies have shown that religion is often a factor in

the lives of American adolescents, influencing their attitudes and behaviors in ways that are commonly viewed as positive and constructive” (Smith 2003, 17).

As the local church is vital to the spiritual development of all believers, it certainly is essential for the young person transitioning to adulthood. Erikson in his psychosocial theory of human development saw this transition as an especially critical juncture in a young person’s life:

Like a trapeze artist, the young person in the middle of vigorous motion must let go of his safe hold on childhood, and reach out for a firm grasp on adulthood, depending for a breathless interval on the relatedness between the past and the future, and the reliability of those he must let go of, and those who will receive him. (Erikson 1968, 90)

Hopefully, the local church, along with the young person’s family, will be at both ends of this acrobatic endeavor. The body of Christ should encourage the release of childhood and be there to help ensure a firm grasp on adulthood. The goal of the church is to help every Christian reach maturity, as Paul wrote in his letter to Ephesus: “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Eph 4:15-16).

Lasting Faith

The term “lasting faith” may lead some to believe that this refers to the keeping of one’s salvation or relationship to God. For this study, the term has nothing to do with the “perseverance of the saints” and eternal security. As defined in the Terminology section of chapter 1, lasting faith refers to the propensity of young people to stay involved a local church after high school. This propensity is critical to the development of a maturing spiritual life.

The New Testament makes a strong case for church involvement being a necessary ingredient to ongoing spiritual growth. As stated earlier, the things believers are called on to do are not accomplished in seclusion. According to Ephesians 4:11-16, the goal of body life within the local church is the spiritual maturity of every individual member and the resulting unity in Christ that maturity brings.

Roelkepartain wrote about the findings of a study conducted by the Search Institute about the effectiveness of Christian education. The report was summed up as follows: “A person of mature faith experiences both a life-transforming relationship to a loving – the vertical theme – and a consistent devotion to others – the horizontal theme” (Roelkepartain 1990, 497). The Search Institute discovered that six factors in congregations increase individual members’ faith maturity. One of those is that “members personally experience other members’ care and concern” (Roelkepartain 1990, 497). One cannot have this experience without connection to a local congregation.

Mentoring is a critical part of spiritual maturity. According to Wuthnow, “The historical aspect of spiritual practice is not simply a set of writings that link people abstractly to some religious tradition. For most people, it is more tangibly expressed in the lives of particular individuals who have gone before them or who set an example by walking beside them” (Wuthnow 1998, 190).

Spiritual maturity is not possible without lasting faith, or the ongoing involvement of individuals in a local congregation. There are too many commands, instructions, and principles in the New Testament that cannot be accomplished by solitary believers. As Stafford writes, “God’s people need God’s people in order to know God. Life in Christ is a corporate affair. All God’s promises were made to God’s people – plural. All the New Testament epistles address Christians in churches. The Bible simply does not know the existence of an individual, isolated Christian” (Stafford 2005, 47).

Adolescence

How does the idea of church participation relate to the period of life called adolescence? Since involvement in the local church is important for every member of the body of Christ, it is crucial that the church has a clear understanding of the different age groups. This study is focused on teenagers and young adults, and there has been much research on adolescent development. The purpose of this section is not to be an exhaustive treatment of such study but a succinct discussion of this period of a young person's life. This can help provide a better understanding of the influences that shape the spiritual lives of adolescents.

Adolescence is not always easy to define. Most would agree that it definitely contains the teenage years, but when does it begin and end? The idea of adolescence is a relatively modern invention. According to Mark Lamport, "The concept of 'adolescence' is a creation of the late-19th and early-20th centuries. When biblical authors talk about stages of human development, only children and adults are compared" (Lamport 1990, 18). The Apostle Paul wrote of leaving childhood and becoming a man (1 Cor 13:11), and John, in his first epistle, wrote of children and adults, although he did distinguish between younger and older adults: "I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father" (1 John 2:13). Nevertheless, there is not a mention of adolescence in Scripture.

John Santrock calls adolescence "the period of life between childhood and adulthood . . . [and] lasts from roughly 10 to 13 years of age and ends at 18 to 22 years of age, [but] defining when adolescence ends is not an easy task. It has been said that adolescence begins in biology and ends in culture" (Santrock 1990, 28-29).

Chapman Clark writes that adolescence should be seen as a “sociological and psychological time of life, with physiological markers along the way (such as puberty)” (Clark 2000, [Youth_Ministry_in_an_Age_of_Delayed_Adulthood.html](#)). He states that while developmentalists mark adolescence by physical changes, it actually begins when young people begin to separate themselves from their role as children in the family. He contends that adolescence is getting longer and longer, especially in Western, urban culture and the characteristics many have seen as indicative of a generation gap “are actually signs of delayed adulthood” (Clark 2000, [Youth_Ministry_in_an_Age_of_Delayed_Adulthood.html](#)).

Various theorists have advanced ideas about human development cognitively, emotionally, morally, and spiritually. They have proposed various ideas about the stages of development through which humans navigate. They have dealt with this segment of a young person’s life as a period of great transition. Perry Downs suggests that something as personal as spiritual faith “cannot be reduced to predictable developmental stages” (Downs 1995, 82). But the ideas proposed in developmentalism can help educators and ministry leaders better understand this extremely volatile stage of life. As Joseph Moore states, “Yes, it is true that we all fluctuate between stages of spiritual and emotional growth during our entire lives. We sometimes behave like spiritual or emotional infants and at other times like adults. Most often we are somewhere in the middle. It is certainly true that we cannot confine the spirit of God to neatly defined stages that sound good on paper,” but he adds, “there is surely some merit to the concept of advancing gradually in a relationship with God” (Moore 1988, 84).

Chapman Clark believes that postmodern culture has confused the issue of developmental theory: “In particular, such variables as shifts in cultural values and structure; changes in the family system; new research into peer relations; gender and

ethnic differences; and new ways of thinking about morality, character, and ethics have become increasingly important in describing the nature of adolescence” (Clark 2001, 43).

Clark says this challenges the church to be extremely aware of issues that affect young people and to be prepared to minister in a variety of settings and through a wide array of methods, “. . . for the entire adolescent experience fluctuates constantly and deviates greatly according to such variables as culture, locale, and familial health and makeup” (Clark 2001, 45). Clark underscores the uniqueness of every young person: “In postmodern society, successful completion of individuation and becoming an adult is such a subjective experience that it varies from person to person. There is no societal or even intuitive moment when someone has ‘arrived’ on the threshold of adulthood” (Clark 2001, 51).

Clark also points out the fact that adolescence is a relatively modern invention; thus, it is difficult to find specific guidelines from scripture that apply to ministry with this age group. He writes, “But that certainly does not mean the church should sit back and allow theories of development to create a *de facto* theology of adolescent development. In fact the opposite is true, especially for those of us engaged in youth ministry. If you are involved in ministry, you are called to be a practical theologian, for you are making divine revelation relevant and coherent to a specific cultural setting” (Clark 2001, 60). It is a crucial task of the church to know adolescents and understand the transitions they face because, in spite of the individual nature of development, there are enough similarities to assist the body of Christ in developing strategies.

The primary element in this process for each individual is God Himself, as expressed by Frances Anderson: “While some aspects of faith development can be charted in levels or stages, the area of saving faith in Jesus Christ is the realm of the Holy Spirit, who works in His own way and time. However, God’s creation has order and

sequence, and a certain order can be perceived in the development and growth of faith” (Anderson 1995, 169).

Eric Johnson believes that an individual’s development of a Christian worldview is a part of post-formal thinking and cannot be achieved independently because “Christian post-formal thinking is communal. There is a distrust of one’s own reason and a high regard for the wisdom found in others. Consequently, one’s personal appropriation of the faith should be pervaded with humility, existing in an inevitable tension with the communal wisdom of the church” (Johnson 1996b, 102).

Timothy Gibson sees the church’s task as assisting teenagers in their spiritual growth through mentoring and discipleship that provide them with role models who demonstrate consistent obedience to God’s standards. He proposes that “a person does not have beliefs of his or her own until those beliefs undergo challenge . . . when they internalize the Christian worldview, which grows out of a personal commitment to Christ” (Gibson 2004, docid=5008550636).

This topic is important to this research because ministry leaders must understand this period of life called adolescence to adequately provide instruction and guidance that will have a genuine and lasting effect on the lives of young people. While there are different theories about the stages of transition through which teenagers must travel, there is no question that they are going through a period of tremendous change – physically, cognitively, emotionally, and spiritually. Youth pastors, parents, Sunday School teachers, and others must become students of students to be as effective as possible in their role as equippers of this younger generation so the impact of this discipleship process will be lifelong.

Spiritual Influences on Adolescents

It is critical to understand that whatever affects young people during their teenage years will impact their young adult years and there are many different influences in the life of adolescents: parents, peers, teachers, coaches, media, and much more. But what impacts the spiritual lives of young people the most? What people or organizations shape the way they view God, their relationship to Him, and their purpose in life? This survey will summarize four different research reports that focused on the spiritual and religious lives of teenagers.

In a study designed in part to determine the age of conversion among respondents, Mark Lamport gathered information on the various influences of young people during their teen years. He reports that the top ten influences on spiritual growth in these young people are (in order from most influential) church services, mother, other person, youth group meetings, pastor/minister, personal devotion time, youth group members, retreats, Christian literature, and father (Lamport 1990, 25).

Roger Dudley conducted a 10-year longitudinal study of 1,500 Seventh Day Adventist young people. When the research began, these students were in their middle teens. They were surveyed each year until the study was complete. His interest was to discover how they progressed spiritually over this 10-year time frame. One of the factors measured was whether or not these young adults were continuing to participate in church services and activities. Key factors surfaced that had a significant impact on continued church involvement (Dudley 1999, 110-21).

The Barna Research Group conducted five surveys among teens from all across the country over a period of two years. More than 3,000 youth, ages 13 to 18, were included in the analysis (Barna 2001, 19-20, 161-62). The purpose of this study was to get an overall view of the influences, thought patterns, and behaviors of this

generation called the “Mosaics” (born from 1984-2002) (Barna 2001, 12-13). Barna found that faith “is important to young people today. But just as James wrote that believing in God is not enough of a commitment . . . neither is the fact that teenagers embrace spirituality as reason alone for celebration and high expectations” (Barna 2001, 119). At the time of this report, 86% of teenagers described themselves as Christians. This percentage had changed very little over the course of a decade (Barna 2001, 119).

The National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) was a national survey conducted with 3,370 teenagers, ages 13 to 17, and their parents (Smith and Denton 2005, 292). Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton were the lead researchers on this project designed to discover the critical issues in the spiritual and religious lives of young people. Their study led to a subsequent publication by Phil Schwadel and Christian Smith that is more specifically related to Protestant teens and reported on important statistics related to this segment of young people in America. Sixty-five percent of these teens attend church at least once per month, with teens from conservative denominations more likely to attend regularly. Forty-nine percent reported current activity in a religious youth group. Ninety percent of these teens say they believe in God, and 49% say they feel very or extremely close to God. Sixty percent assert that religious faith is very or extremely important to them. And if given the choice to make it on their own, 87% of those teens that do attend church would attend the same church (Schwadel and Smith 2005, PortraitsProtTeens.pdf).

From these research projects, four key areas of adolescent spiritual influence come to the forefront. The things that made the most significant spiritual impact in the lives of teenagers were parents, peers, other significant adults (pastors, youth ministers, adult volunteers, etc.), and ministry involvement that exceeds mere youth group

attendance. The relationships of these young people were by far the most noteworthy agents of influence in their lives.

Parents

Each of these research projects concluded that parents play a vital role in the spiritual and religious lives of their adolescent children. Although there are many young people in churches who do not have the benefit of their parents also being church-involved, those who do seem to have a much better probability of staying connected to the church as they move into adulthood.

Of the spiritual influence factors that surfaced in Dudley's study, the most prominent had to do with the young people's families. He writes, "Adolescents whose biological families remain intact, whose father and mother both attend church frequently, and who participate in family worship are more likely to remain committed to the family faith when they reach adulthood" (Dudley 1999, 118).

Lamport's work also revealed the significant impact of parents in the spiritual lives of their teenage children (Lamport 1990, 25). Of the top ten influences on spiritual growth that he listed, mothers were the number two factor, second only to church attendance. Reports from other research showed that church attendance among teens is strongly correlated to the attendance of their parents. The spiritual impact of fathers is also in that list.

The NSYR research also found a positive correlation in this area. It revealed that those youth who have parents involved in church are more likely to be involved in a religious youth group. There seems to be a stronger effect from parental involvement in conservative denominations than in mainline Protestant denominations. This study concluded what has been discovered in other research: parental relationships are very

important as a spiritual influence factor in young people (Schwadel and Smith 2005, PortraitsProtTeens.pdf).

In a 1996 study of 2,130 youth ministers from all over the United States, respondents were asked about their main concerns regarding youth ministry. According to Strommen, Jones, and Rahn, lack of parental involvement is an “issue troubling more than half (55 percent) the youth ministers – which is probably on the low side. Should our hypothesis be correct that a disproportionate number of nonrespondents (48 percent) are the frazzled and overworked who are ready to resign, then the true percentage of youth ministers troubled over this issue would probably be higher” (Strommen, Jones, and Rahn 2001, 54). (“Nonrespondents” are those who received the survey, but did not return it.)

Ed Stetzer, director of LifeWay Research, places strong emphasis on the role of parents in helping develop the faith of their children. He notes, “There is no easy way to say it, but it must be said. Parents and churches are not passing on a robust Christian faith and an accompanying commitment to the church. We can take some solace in the fact that many do eventually return. But Christian parents and churches need to ask the hard questions, ‘What is it about our faith commitment that does not find root in the lives or our children?’” (LifeWay 2007, 0%2C1703%2CA%25253D165949%252526M%25253D200906%2C00.html).

While parents have been found to have profound spiritual influence on their teenage children, youth pastors are frustrated by their lack of involvement. Either parents are opting out of getting involved in the youth ministry segment of their children’s lives, or they are not given adequate opportunities to do so.

Peers

Peer influence would seem to be a given in every area of a young person's life. The importance of relationships that is demonstrated in the data from each of these research projects lends credence to that assumption. Casual observation shows that students congregate with other students at sporting events, the mall, restaurants, etc. Peer influence makes its mark in the types of music listened to, clothing styles, and language usage. It makes sense that peers would make an impact on spiritual matters for adolescents as well.

Lamport's top-ten list placed "other person" as the third most important factor in adolescent spiritual growth, right after church services and mothers (Lamport 1990, 25). Since mother and father are listed separately on the list, as well as pastor and ministers, this category reflects the influence of both other significant adults and of a student's peers. Lamport underscored the importance of youth group members, especially for those young people who do not come from Christian homes (Lamport 1990, 27).

Barna also recognized the importance of consequential peer relationships within the faith community. Their interest in church participation is "keenly tied to the involvement of the individual's peer group: Where the group goes, so go its individuals" (Barna 2001, 134). Barna states that students are three times more likely to be involved in a church youth ministry if they have friends there. When asked what they like best about youth group experience, half of the respondents stated that they liked the presence of their friends (Barna 2001, 135).

Other Significant Adults

Unfortunately, not every young person lives in a Christian home with parents who encourage church involvement or who provide spiritual influence. These studies disclose the important factor of other significant adults in making a spiritual impact on the lives of young people, especially for those who do not receive such input from home. This influence is also important for those students who do come from Christian homes.

Lamport, based on his findings, stresses the importance of this factor for those adolescents who do not have the privilege of Christian parents. An important issue for youth ministries in the local church is reaching out and ministering to those students whose parents are not involved in the church. Many youth ministries impact the lives of non-church youth, but can their spiritual influence have lasting effects if the parents are not involved as well? Lamport points to these other significant relationships in the church to make the difference: “The importance of youth group members and church is even more pronounced for those with little or no Christian home environment. The church and youth ministers must become ‘surrogate spiritual parents’ to those from non-Christian homes” (Lamport 1990, 27). Adult mentoring, by parents if possible, but also by other significant adults, is crucial. This goes beyond the paid staff to adult volunteers in the youth ministry and other adults with whom the students may come in contact.

Dudley discovered this vital factor in his research. One of the strong influencers he found related both to relationships with other significant adults (aside from family) and participation in church life: “Attachment or bonding theory is consistent with the finding that young people who are drawn early into congregational life, given significant responsibilities, and experience warm relationships with the adult members tend to remain active in their adult years” (Dudley 1999, 119).

Barna also echoed this finding. The most prominent spiritual influence in the lives of teenagers discovered by the Barna Research Group is relationships. These should begin in the home with Christian parents, but that is not always available to students. Many come from non-Christian, non-churched homes. Other significant adult relationships within the church are crucial. This means that church youth ministry must go beyond providing entertaining programs and events to creating an environment where these relationships can be cultivated (Barna 2001, 119-43).

Smith and Denton found this factor to be a key to church attendance during the teenage years. Adolescents' satisfaction with church is highly influenced by relationships with other significant adults. Underscoring the importance of significant adult relationships, 81% of adolescents who attend church say that the adults at their church are very or somewhat easy to talk with and get to know (Schwadel and Smith 2005, *PortraitsProtTeens.pdf*).

During the volatile years of transition from childhood to adulthood, young people need direction, encouragement, and solid examples of mature Christianity. Overholt and Penner write, "We need to get in tune with the God-given cycles of life, and stop abandoning teens to the frustrating experience of figuring out adulthood for themselves. In the eyes of teenagers, adulthood is inevitable but, because of its responsibilities, not particularly desired" (Overholt and Penner 2002, 54). Youth pastors are a part of this collaborative group of adults who seek to impact the teens in their ministry in a way that produces long-term spiritual growth. Strommen, Jones, and Rahn suggest, "Youth ministers who are focused in purpose, strongly oriented to helping youth own their program, and relate well to youth, are the ones most likely to see gains in the spiritual development of their youth" (Strommen, Jones, and Rahn 2001, 163). Young people clearly benefit from relationships with significant adults other than their parents.

Church Involvement

Being actively involved in church services and activities plays an important role in the spiritual development of teenagers. If these young people are not present in the church, ministry leaders and volunteers have very little opportunity to interact with and influence them spiritually. The research cited here also underscores the importance of this factor.

Lamport discovered that being in church services and youth group meetings were also significant influencing agents in the development of adolescent faith. Besides relationships, this is the other key ingredient he points to for the spiritual growth of young people. He writes, “The correlation of church involvement and youth who see faith as ‘very important’ is high” (Lamport 1990, 26). But the correlation goes beyond mere attendance. Peer leadership is also an important factor. Peer leadership is when teenagers have a stake in their own ministry by playing a vital role in their youth programs. This role can involve assisting in planning and carrying out events and personal involvement in ministry. Another key factor is service. Lamport suggests that a hands-on faith is very important. Teenagers need to be taught to live out their faith in practical ways by giving of themselves in service to others (Lamport 1990, 29).

The NSYR study found evidence for the importance of this factor of church involvement as well. The teens that regularly attend religious services report greater importance of religious faith in their lives than do other young people. As to their feelings about church, 79% of those that attend say that church is usually warm and welcoming. Forty-nine percent described church as a good place to discuss serious issues. Eighty-six percent of those who attend responded that there are opportunities for teen involvement in their church. While the NSYR discovered the interrelatedness of church attendance and valuing their Christian faith, it is worthy of attention that

adolescents were positively impacted by the chance to be involved in the life of the church and not just simply be youth group participants (Schwadel and Smith 2005, *PortraitsProtTeens.pdf*).

Chap Clark writes about the effectiveness of youth ministry as closely related to how young people are assimilated into full participation in the church: “This implies an individual faith as a necessary starting point, but by the time a student graduates, the measure of a program’s effectiveness must become how deeply and honestly the students have connected to the larger body” (Clark 2002, 26).

Since long-term spiritual growth and continued connection to the local church after high school are focal points of this research, church involvement is an important factor. In another study, the Search Institute found that “the more time youth give in service to the community through their congregation, the greater their loyalty and bonding to the church. Which means that as young people experience meaningful service and the resulting impact on their faith life, they become more loyal to the organization providing the opportunity” (Strommen, Jones, and Rahn 2001, 186-87).

Miscellaneous Factors

The following factors did not surface as much in the studies above as the previous four, but are worthy of mention as consequential influences in the spiritual lives of adolescents. Lamport found that a personal devotional life is crucial in the spiritual development of young people. This involves learning to practice personal spiritual disciplines, such as prayer and Bible study (Lamport 1990, 29). Another key factor ascertained by Dudley was related simply to their future intentions about church involvement: “Rather strong support was found for the hypothesis that teenagers who express a desire to remain a member of the faith community when they reach adulthood

and are ‘out on their own’ are more likely to actually do so than those who do not express such an intention” (Dudley 1999, 118).

Spiritual Influences Conclusion

In all of the findings reviewed, relationships consistently seemed to be the primary influence in the spiritual lives of teenagers. Relationships that young people have with their parents, with Christian friends, and with other significant adults in their churches positively affect their spiritual attitudes. In fact, these relationships dominated the list of factors discovered. Another influence that exhibits a strong spiritual impact in young people is the opportunity for them to be more than just an attendee at youth group by having the chance to serve in appropriate, vital roles in the life of the church.

For youth ministry to have the desired effect on the spiritual lives of teenagers, Chapman Clark says that there are several constants that ministry leaders need to keep in mind. The first is that God is constantly seeking those who are lost (Luke 15) and His heart is clearly compassionate toward young people (Mark 10:13-16). God’s love for people is so great that it moved Him to enter human history through the incarnation (Phil 2:5-11). Because of God’s great love, His followers are also called to love and seek out those whom He loves. He therefore calls Christians to go to the world with His message (John 17:18). And finally, the message of the gospel, focused on Jesus Christ, brings healing to every individual regardless of culture, ethnicity, or age (Rom 10:12-13) (Clark 2001, 42).

Ministry leaders interested in reaching and impacting young people at this stage of life must create an atmosphere where the aforementioned influences are allowed to have their full effect. Carol Lytch states, “It is the deeper, more universal things that

congregations offer through a variety of means that attract teens: a sense of belonging, a sense of meaning, and opportunities to develop competence” (Lytch 2004, 9).

Spiritual Influences on Young Adults

As stated earlier, there is little disagreement that many young people leave the church after demonstrating involvement during their teenage years. The influences discussed in the previous section give insight into the factors that impact the lives of these young people during the teen years, but the studies reviewed did not focus on the spiritual and religious influences during early adulthood, which are also important to this research because youth ministry can be a critical part of preparing young people for this new stage of life.

There have been studies conducted that examined the church involvement patterns of young adults and sought to determine the factors involved in their return to church involvement. O’Connor, Hoge, and Alexander conducted one such research project. In a longitudinal study, these researchers began with 16-year-olds and surveyed them again when they were 38 years old. Seventy-nine percent of the respondents said they had become inactive in their church involvement at some point during young adulthood. Sixty-eight percent became inactive by the age of 21. Fifty-eight percent of those who had become inactive became active again at some point later, most between the ages of 23 and 30. The average age of becoming active again was 28. The researchers write, “The main reasons the respondents gave for becoming active again were related to marriage and children or to spiritual needs” (O’Connor, Hoge, and Alexander 2002, 725-27). This age pattern for inactivity and becoming active again in church involvement is similar to that discovered in other studies (Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens 1993; Hoge et al. 2001).

The Alban Institute conducted a study called the Thirty Plus Ministry Project, which involved a series of interviews with adults age 25 to 40 who had become a part of one of 28 churches. The majority of the interviewees had quit attending church at some point and later made the decision to re-join. The most common age of church dropout was 18, and 60% of respondents remained uninvolved at least two years, but non-involvement averaged eight years. The average age of returning to involvement was 26 to 27 and frequently came at a “transition event” such as a move, a new job, or the birth of a child (Gibbon 1990). Making an observation about the adults interviewed, Gibbon writes, “Many young adults discover or return to church involvement between ages twenty-five and thirty-five, but that doesn’t happen automatically, and we can’t say certainly that future young adults will do so” (Gibbon 1990, 33).

Based on years of informal conversations with and observations of young adults, Dan Kimball finds that most people in this age range with whom he has talked hold favorable views of Jesus, but generally negative views of the church and Christians. He writes that every church should see itself as a missionary institution in a post-Christian culture: “Missionaries in a foreign culture don’t practice the faiths or embrace the spiritual beliefs of that culture, but they do respect them, since the missionaries are on the other culture’s turf” (Kimball 2007, 30). His main criticism of Christians is that they live in a Christian sub-culture of their own making that keeps them sheltered and separated from the world around them. Thus they have very little meaningful contact with non-Christians and are ineffective in reaching them (Kimball 2007, 40-48).

Kimball lists six common perceptions of the church among non-churched young adults: “1. The church is an organized religion with a political agenda; 2. The church is judgmental and negative; 3. The church is dominated by males and oppresses females; 4. The church is homophobic; 5. The church arrogantly claims all other religions

are wrong; and, 6. The church is full of fundamentalists who take the whole Bible literally” (Kimball 2007, 69). The young adults from whom Kimball derived these conclusions have, for the most part, had very little church interaction. But if his observations are correct, those are the attitudes and perceptions about the church that young people will regularly encounter when they leave high school and enter the young adult world of college or career. Those ideas may hold strong influence on whether or not they stay involved in the local church.

Wesley Black’s Study

In a significant recent study conducted by Wesley Black called the Faith Journey of Young Adults (FJYA), 1,362 young adults (age 18 to 30) were surveyed quantitatively and 270 were interviewed in group settings. Both active and inactive (in church involvement) young adults were included in the study. The purpose of Black’s study was to discover what these young people attributed to church involvement or non-involvement among those in their age group (Black 2006, 22-23).

A surface reading of Black’s research will not reveal distinctive theological assumptions. It may seem that the reason for his study is simply to find out how parents and ministry leaders can keep young people in consistent church attendance as they enter adulthood. But he states, “Simply attending church or youth activities during the teenage years is not a clear indicator of faithful discipleship” (Black 2006, 43). The key factors discovered by Black have a significant effect on their ongoing church involvement. The underlying theological assumption is that discipleship and church attendance are interrelated. Discipleship and spiritual depth help lead to continued church participation that, in turn, leads to more growth in discipleship and spiritual depth. He writes, “Youth ministry must *do a better job of discipleship* – teaching the basic, biblical concepts of

Christianity, instilling a love and appreciation for intergenerational church relationships, building a personal commitment of faith in the lives of teenagers and helping adolescents *internalize their faith*” (Black 2006, 43). Black was influenced in his study in part by the research of the Barna Group. After their 2006 “twentysomethings” study, the director of the project, David Kinnaman concluded, “A new standard for viable youth ministry should be – not the number of attenders, the sophistication of the events, or the ‘cool’ factor of the youth group – but whether teens have the commitment, passion and resources to pursue Christ intentionally and whole-heartedly after they leave the youth ministry next” (Barna 2006, UpdateID=245).

From the quantitative results of Black’s study, both actives and non-actives chose the same top four reasons (although in almost opposite order) that young adults attend church. These reasons are a deep abiding faith, socializing, routine habit from younger years, and mild interest in spiritual matters (Black 2006, 31). Both groups also chose the same top four reasons (in nearly the same order) that young adults do not attend church. These reasons are that Christians who are fake turn them off; their lifestyle would have to change if they attended; they have other priorities; and they never got involved in church in earlier years (Black 2006, 32).

The qualitative segment of the research yielded slightly different results. When questioned about why young adults attend church, actives gave the top reason as relationships (mainly speaking of peer relationships), followed by deep personal faith, meaningful church experiences, and parents’ influence. Non-actives listed relationships first, routine habit from younger years next, and parents’ influence third (Black 2006, 34). When asked about those who do not attend, actives stated lack of commitment or weak faith as the top reason, followed by being away from parents, and lifestyle choices and friendships. The top three reasons for not attending listed by non-actives were that

church had lost its appeal or value; people were turned off by previous experiences; and lifestyle choices and friendships (Black 2006, 37).

Black's conclusions for youth ministry from this research stressed discipleship, relationships (leading students to be influencers), meaningful involvement in church as a whole, and mentoring by spiritually strong adults. For young adult ministry, he suggests that churches develop an accepting atmosphere for this age group, provide meaningful involvement in the life of the church, and take an intergenerational approach in which young adults interact with older adults in various settings (Black 2006, 43-44).

Black's discoveries about what influences young adults to stay involved in church strongly coincide with the spiritual influences in the lives of teenagers discussed earlier. This should give some indications about the types of concerns that should be at the forefront of youth ministry theory and practice. Relationships with peers, parents, and other significant adults, as well as involvement in the life of the church as a whole are all important factors that could lay a solid foundation for long-term spiritual growth and for continued connection to the local church for young people after they leave high school and head off to college or a job.

Based on his FJYA research, Black developed the Lasting Faith Scale (LFS) to measure the propensity of young people to continue to be involved in the local church after high school. This 30-item online survey is based upon four domains of influence: discipleship and spiritual depth, family influence, mentoring and intergenerational influences, and relationships (Black 2008, 55-56).

Youth Ministry Models

Youth ministry is critical in the local church. It is a vital part of the life of any congregation that seeks to reach and grow entire families and not just certain age groups.

A survey was made of 535 families in twenty rapidly growing churches, all in different North American cities. The study was intended to discover what attracts people to a church. Four out of every five respondents indicated that a church's youth ministry is a very important factor. Youth ministry came in second to preaching in influencing people's decision to join their current church (Roehlkepartain 1989, 7).

Attracting families to the local church is only part of why this ministry to adolescents is so crucial. As discussed, teenagers are on one of the most critical journeys of their lives – the road to maturity. What they face every day at school, from friends, via media, and much more seeks to mold them into the image of the world around them. Michael Hryniuk says, “The influences of individualism, consumerism, and competitiveness in the dominant culture make the intentional spiritual formation of youth more difficult – but also more critical” (Hryniuk 2007, 82).

Every church is different. Likewise, every youth ministry is different. But there are many similarities as patterns of ministry practice emerge. Trends do arise that characterize youth ministry in general in American culture. At some point, someone decided it would be advantageous and appropriate to develop programs and activities that were age-appropriate for teenagers. This stage of life is recognized as a critical time of transition and maturing that prepares young people to move into adulthood. Many good things have come from this focus within the local church. Youth ministry has become more and more professional with specialized training, as Christian colleges and seminaries have begun to offer degrees, or at least concentrations, in youth ministry. However, some writers and researchers have noticed a pattern that seems to mark the majority of youth ministries today. According to Carol Duerksen, “The youth group becomes a separate ‘youth congregation’ paralleling the life of the congregation. The sponsors and leaders are viewed as the bridge between the two ‘congregations,’ the youth

are not active participants in congregational life, and there are few meaningful contacts between youth and adults in their church family” (Duerksen 2001, 42).

Are local churches achieving success in youth ministry? Barna asked thousands of believers to rate what churches do best and worst. “Creating programs for teenagers” received the lowest rating (Barna 1996, 43-44). Some of the trends that emerge in youth ministry are certainly negative and are being addressed. In the book *reThink*, Steve Wright and Chris Graves share the pressure that many youth pastors feel:

Sadly many student pastors are told that the solution to the declining conversions is to work harder or do ministry bigger and better. But, if our programs are bigger, our budgets are bigger, our shows are bigger, and our workloads as pastors are bigger, then why are baptisms still declining? The solution isn’t to kick the traditional student ministry model up a notch; the solution is to reexamine how the Bible should guide our framework to develop students and encourage the parents and adults who influence them. (Wright and Graves 2007, 31)

Mark DeVries writes that many involved in church work with teens began to look for new ways to approach youth ministry: “Weary of party-and-pizza-centered youth programs, lots of us had begun searching for alternative models by the mid-‘90s.” In reviewing a couple of books that introduce new strategies for this ministry, he points out that “the focus began to shift away from discipleship meetings to discipleship practices” (DeVries 2004b, read/5002397890).

Some significant writings have emerged in recent years promoting new paradigms for youth ministry that seek to bring the church back to the vision of developing a more thorough model of discipleship in the lives of young people. There are numerous models and variations of models that have been written about, but four prominent models will be considered in this study. Purpose-driven youth ministry, congregational youth ministry, family-based youth ministry, and contemplative youth ministry have both similarities and differences that are worth noting.

Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry

Doug Fields, a long-time youth ministry veteran, developed a model called purpose-driven youth ministry in reaction to the activity- and program-based approach that he and many other youth pastors had used for years. The pattern of ministry during his early years left him tired and frustrated (Fields 1998, 27-33). From his discoveries through experience, he wrote *Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry*.

A purpose-driven youth ministry focuses on achieving the New Testament purposes of the church (as set forth in the book *The Purpose-Driven Church*): evangelism, worship, fellowship, discipleship, and ministry. Fields says that these purposes are not created or developed, but discovered because they are the purposes God set forth in the pages of the New Testament (Fields 1998, 17, 44-45; Warren 1995). Writing from a Reformed Christian Church perspective, Sydney Hielema considers the four purposes of the church to be worship, evangelism, discipleship, and social action because ministry is included in all of church life (Hielema 2000, 324). Chuck Lawless uses six purposes, or “pillars,” in his church model. He adds prayer because although it should also saturate every other venture of the church, it is important enough to be focused on as one of the purposes (Lawless 2002). Even with the differences, all three acknowledge that the local church has God-given purposes for it to fulfill. Hielema writes, “While the specific number of purposes is subject to debate . . . recognizing a multiplicity of purposes encourages the church to recognize the fundamental goals of each of its ministry activities and to develop a diversity of ministries to cover all the purposes, at least to some degree” (Hielema 2000, 324).

Purpose-driven youth ministry is built around nine components. First, Fields stresses the power of God. Nothing worth accomplishing is achieved without God working through passionate leaders with pure hearts. The next component is purpose,

which involves discovering why a ministry exists and then, through leadership, communicating that purpose effectively and often. The third piece of this puzzle is to understand the ministry's potential audience. This is identifying which students are the targets for the various purposes. Fields stresses the importance of understanding that different students are at various stages and are not targets for every purpose of the youth ministry. The fourth component is programs. Programs are not bad if they do not become the sole focus of the ministry. It is important to decide which programs will reach the potential audience so the ministry can fulfill God's purposes for them. Next is process. This entails designing and aligning the programs in order to help students move toward spiritual maturity. The sixth element of purpose-driven youth ministry is planned values, or defining which values will strengthen the ministry and enhance the pursuit of fulfilling the purposes. Seventh is teaming up with parents. Fields insists that this strengthens the youth ministry and the church. The next critical component is participating leaders. Youth ministry is best accomplished as a team effort. It is necessary, for an effective ministry, to find the right volunteers and develop them into ministers who fulfill the purposes. Perseverance is the final component. Youth ministry is not easy and is a continual process of learning to survive the overwhelming responsibilities, discipline problems, and the adventure of change (Fields 1998, 19-22).

Another key concept of Fields' purpose-driven model is that he characterizes students into five groups that identify their level of commitment. "Community" encompasses all young people within a reasonable distance from the church. The "crowd" is made up of those who attend the large-group events and programs. "Congregation" students have made a commitment to Christ and move to the next level of commitment in the youth group by becoming a part of a small group. Youth who have made a decision to devote themselves to developing spiritual habits, like regular Bible

reading, prayer, accountability partnerships, and Scripture memory are considered “committed” students. And the “core” group consists of those who have discovered their areas of giftedness and desire to use those to minister to others (Fields 1998, 87-90).

These levels of commitment are pictured as concentric circles where the aim is to move students from the outer (community) circle to the core circle. This progression is accomplished by the five purposes. It is important to understand Fields’ perspective on these levels:

The circles provide us with an identification, not an identity. We are careful not to assign a “value” to a student based on commitment level. We don’t have acknowledgment ceremonies at which we say, “Hey, everyone, Phillip has just moved from the crowd circle to the congregation circle. Let’s give him a hand.” The purpose of the circles is not to isolate students, but to recognize commitment levels so we can enhance growth by being more strategic in our program design. (Fields 1998, 93)

Hielema agrees with the caution in the above quote because he sees faith development as sometime sequential, but often non-sequential. There is often regression (and necessarily so) as well as progression (Hielema 2000, 330). Another issue Hielema takes with Fields’ model is that ministry is not reserved only for the most committed (Fields’ “core” students). He relates that ministry should be a part of the life of every child of God, even those who have not yet made a concrete commitment because their involvement in ministry may be the very thing that leads them to faith in Christ (Hielema 2000, 330).

While Hielema sees some significant value in the five levels of commitment, he does not believe that respecting teens’ commitment has to have the programming advantages of a megachurch. He believes reaching students at different commitment levels takes three things: “(1) congregations who offer as much variety as their resources will allow, (2) leaders who are sensitive to the faith life of each teen, and (3) leaders who are creative in finding ways to challenge each one to grow” (Hielema 2000, 330).

One of Hielema's chief criticisms of the purpose-driven model is what he sees as the "unquestioning incorporation of prevalent trends or our culture" into the practice of youth ministry. He asks some very thoughtful questions: "Is our ministry to kids shaped by what the culture has made them (and us) to be, or is it shaped by our vision of who they (and we) are in Christ? Or must we find means of working within both of these dynamics in our youth ministry?" (Hielema 2000, 325).

Hielema is also critical of Fields' assumption that age segregation is a given. He believes Fields points the way toward developing positive relationships with both pastor and parents, but does not show the youth as part of overall church life. Hielema insists that adolescents must be viewed as part of the rest of the church, writing, "I am convinced that the interplay between our culture and the Christian life requires a two-pronged youth ministry approach in which youth groups flourish in their own right (which may include youth-only worship) but that also pays special attention to their niche in the larger picture of congregational and community life as an alternative to the dynamics of our culture" (Hielema 2000, 326).

One of the main strengths of the purpose-driven youth ministry model is that it is broad in nature. It can be applied to a wide variety of situations and types of churches. This approach does not rely on set programs or activities, but encourages each ministry to discover how they can best fulfill their purposes. Brian Richardson, in introducing some various youth ministry models, writes about Fields' purpose-driven model: "Our youth need a model of ministry that includes that kind of balance" (Richardson 2000).

Another positive aspect of this strategy is the inclusion of parents and other significant adults. The research cited about the key spiritual influences in the lives of adolescents places these relationships at the forefront of their spiritual development and continued involvement in the church. About parents, Fields writes, "Youth workers are

becoming increasingly aware that a student-only ministry is less effective than a family-friendly ministry” (Fields 1998, 251). Concerned and committed adult leaders are important for all students involved in a youth ministry, but especially for those who have no spiritual influence in their own homes. Fields believes in the critical role these leaders play in youth ministry: “Healthy youth ministry is built on the strong leadership of adult volunteers who express their passion by caring and taking time from their busy lives to build relationships with students and help them grow in their faith” (Fields 1998, 21).

Congregational Youth Ministry

The congregational youth ministry model focuses on how the entire church body can impact the lives of teenagers. As stated by Strommen, Jones, and Rahn, “Rather than viewing the congregation’s youth ministry as an effort to keep them off the streets, protect them from the evils of society, or keep them interested in their church, a congregation needs to begin viewing their youths as important partners in bringing others into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ” (Strommen, Jones, and Rahn 2001, 57). Does the church tend to look at children and youth simply as adults-in-training or as partners in the gospel? The proponents of congregational youth ministry believe the church needs to view young people as a group vital to the church now and not just a way to reach parents.

Stephen Haymond also writes about a vital connection that is absent: “The missing link is one that is virtually non-existent in the youth culture of today, including youth ministries: the link of generations” (Haymond 1998, 4). He believes that the separation that is unhealthy for young people is more than just the division of them from their families, but also from any older generation segment of the church. He echoes what has been discovered about the important role that other significant adults play in the lives

of adolescents when he writes, “Influence, and heart involvement of godly Christian parents and other Christian adults would increase their integration as godly adults into the life of the church” (Haymond 1998, 4-5).

Interaction between generations is a significant element of this model.

Advocates of this approach to youth ministry believe that adolescents must have regular interaction and partnership with other church members of all ages. But this is not what they see happening in most churches. Strommen, Jones, and Rahn talk about what happens when this interaction is absent: “Youth raised in the church can come to the time of high school graduation without having entered into the intergenerational life of a congregation. As such, they feel little loyalty to their congregation, little involvement in her mission, and little feeling of obligation to support its work” (Strommen, Jones, and Rahn 2001, 169).

Adult involvement is a necessary component of this model, as pointed out by Overholt and Penner: “Long-term, non-judgmental relationships of unshockable friendships with youth are a must” (Overholt and Penner 2002, 14). But that involvement goes beyond the role of adult leaders who have been recruited to work in the youth ministry. Overholt and Penner base many of their conclusions on the data gathered from Reginald Bibby’s Project Teen Canada from 1984, 1992, and 2000, which shed light on values, behaviors, expectations, and concerns of young people in Canada for nearly two decades. They see the connection between different age groups as vital to society in general and certainly in the church: “Part of the role of being a bridge between the adult and youth worlds includes creating places where relationships between generations can be built. Without intergenerational connections, society suffers” (Overholt and Penner 2002, 151).

Carol Duerksen reiterates this same point when she states, “The goal of a youth group is not to separate the teenagers from the rest of the congregation into their own little ‘mini-church.’ Rather, it is a comfortable setting in which they can relate to peers and from which they connect with the congregation in a variety of ways” (Duerksen 2001, 65).

The purpose of congregational youth ministry is to increase the connectedness between teenagers and the rest of the church body. Instead of just planning events and programs for youth, this model involves them in planning and carrying out events, programs, and ministry opportunities. The events and programs that are being planned are not just for the youth group, but for other segments of the church and for the whole church body as well. This model is not advocating making adolescents deacons and elders, but is seeking to involve teens in the life of the church at large. The goal of this approach is developing them into maturing believers who are committed to the local church. Bo Boshers discusses how this transition can begin: “You and your pastor need to devise a plan to connect students with the larger church body so that when they graduate from high school they do not leave the church. We want these young adults to know they are part of the body of Christ and to understand the role they can play in the church through the use of their spiritual gifts on their journey of becoming fully devoted followers of Christ” (Boshers 1997, 253).

This attachment to the larger body of the local congregation is what the proponents of congregational youth ministry see as part of the answer to the fallout that is prevalent as young people finish high school. Strommen, Jones, and Rahn champion this model for ministry to teens: “This objective has become an increasingly vital one. The current approach of many youth leaders fails in developing loyalty and a sense of ownership in a congregation” (Strommen, Jones, and Rahn 2001, 164). But it is more

than just keeping them in church. It focuses on giving them more opportunity to grow in their faith and take ownership of important ministry as a vital part of the body of Christ.

Family-Based Youth Ministry

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.
(Deut 6:5-7)

It is clear from Scripture that the spiritual development of children is ultimately the responsibility of their parents. Current trends in youth ministry have detracted from that parental role as the church has taken over the responsibility of the spiritual nurturing of young people. The spiritual influence of parents can be diminished by the separation of young people from their families every time they enter the church building. As Steve Wright and Chris Graves point out, “Some parents and churches unfortunately view student ministry . . . as a spiritual drop-off service best left to the professionals” (Wright and Graves 2007, 47). The family-based model of youth ministry seeks to reverse this tendency.

Mark DeVries, in his book *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, deals with this very issue: “During the last century, church and parachurch youth ministries alike have increasingly (and often unwittingly) held to a single strategy that has become the most common characteristic of youth ministry today as the isolation of teenagers from the adult world and particularly from their own parents” (DeVries 2004a, 21). Therefore he has proposed a family-based model of youth ministry to deal with that dilemma: “The family-ministry model is driven primarily by a desire to empower families. . . . One of the key assumptions behind this kind of ministry is that the real action of the Christian

nurture of children and youth takes place not in youth programs or even in the church but in families” (DeVries 2004a, 174).

Many who study youth ministry and are seeking to bring about positive changes in the way in which it is accomplished are returning to the importance of parents taking their rightful role in the lives of their children. Strommen, Jones, and Rahn agree with this role for parents: “This is a necessary development for a number of reasons, not least the importance of parents in the spiritual development of their children and youths. Increasingly, there is awareness that faith is best ignited in the home and that parents are best situated to shape the faith lives of their children” (Strommen, Jones, and Rahn 2001, 168).

Strommen and Hardel also deal with the need for a more integrated approach to the process of making disciples of children and youth. “A faith-formation paradigm limited to religious instruction for children and a youth group for high school students no longer equips one generation to effectively pass on the faith to the next generation. A paradigm shift is needed – one that results in a more comprehensive approach and fosters faith through experiences in the family, the congregation, the community and the culture” (Strommen and Hardel 2000, 19). When the church attempts to minister to the whole family together (rather than separately), everyone benefits.

Advocates of family-based youth ministry believe that the church is the very best place to accomplish such integration and to affect such a paradigm shift. Strommen and Hardel write, “Like no other institution, a congregation can become family to its members. Through intergenerational activities a congregation can create opportunities for members to become surrogate parents, uncles, aunts, brothers, or sisters to one another. A congregation is the only institution in a community that is open to all ages

and is equipped in its program and message to provide a family experience” (Strommen and Hardel 2000, 157).

Questions will arise about the many students involved in a youth ministry whose parents are not Christians or do not attend church. How do they fit into a family-based youth ministry model? This idea demonstrates the possibility of healthy spiritual development for young people whose parents provide no spiritual atmosphere in their home. Family-based youth ministry not only brings biological families together to better equip their own children, but it provides a spiritual family to play the same role for those whose parents do not participate. Burn and DeVries explain how this model benefits teens from non-Christian homes: “We also take students who come from families that do not profess Christ and assimilate them into the Church body as extended family” (Burns and DeVries 2003, 17). This model brings more focus on the role of families and underscores the need for the church to fill that role for those whose family is not a part of their spiritual development. Burns and DeVries state:

Family-based youth ministry is not about working exclusively with Christian families. The Church acts much like an extended family to those students who do not come from Christian homes. It provides caring Christian adults who will reach out and nurture students in their faith – this puts us in a better position to reach nonbelieving parents than the prevailing mind-set in youth ministry. (Burns and DeVries 2003, 53-54)

Strommen and Hardel do not suggest that youth ministry be done away with in this new paradigm. In fact, they stress that it is important for churches to help create a Christian youth subculture where teens are encouraged, supported, challenged, feeling safe to ask tough questions (Strommen and Hardel 2000, 186-224).

Jim Burns seeks to help churches better understand this concept of ministry to teens: “Family-based youth ministry isn’t about adding a program. It’s a mindset” (Burns 2002, 21). He briefly discusses the pattern in the Old Testament that is still

practiced by orthodox Jews today. The Shema (Deut 6:4-9) is the cornerstone of their educational philosophy, which centers on their homes. Those parents see it as their responsibility to attend to the spiritual training and well-being of their children. A conference attendee wrote a definition for this approach to youth ministry for Burns and DeVries: “Family-based youth ministry is a paradigm, not a program. It is ministering to youth in the most biblical and effective way possible by equipping and empowering the most influential people in a teenager’s life – their parents” (Burns and DeVries 2003, 41).

It seems that the modern church has largely taken on the role of spiritual development in the lives of children – almost exclusively in many instances. Parents may make sure their children are in Sunday School and at youth activities because they have been led to believe for many years that it is the church’s job to train their children in spiritual matters. Because of that, Burns says, “Today many families are lacking the understanding and tools necessary to raise children in the legacy of faith. We, as part of the church leadership, must shoulder some of the blame, because we’ve let parents delegate their children’s spiritual training to us” (Burns 2002, 21). He and DeVries write, “We are all called to do family-based youth ministry, we must help families succeed, and we must change our mind-set and make the biblical principle to equip families to succeed a part of daily youth ministry” (Burns and DeVries 2003, 16).

This mindset change will take some time to make because the common model of youth ministry is so entrenched in church practice. Advocates of this approach, like Burns and DeVries, believe it is worth the time and effort: “Family-based youth ministry is about changing how we view the work of youth ministry. We should never underestimate the power of parents in the spiritual formation of their children. If spiritual formation is the key – and we believe it is – parents are too valuable to leave out of the equation. We need to bring parents into the circumstances and situations of their

children, affirming and helping to re-establish parental roles in the spiritual formation of our students” (Burns and DeVries 2003, 17).

According to Burns, developing a family-based youth ministry entails at least four things: informing parents (ensuring that they know what is taking place in the lives of their children at the church), assisting parents (helping families be successful at their role of raising their children), involving parents (giving them roles to play in the youth ministry), and encouraging parents (helping them through the unpredictable adolescent years) (Burns 2002, 21). Burns and DeVries together write about four pillars of partnering with parents. Those pillars are to communicate, encourage and equip, involve, and reach out (Burns and DeVries 2003, 20-29). This type of ministry can help foster the positive influences that shape the spiritual lives of teenagers.

Some of those who promote this type of youth ministry find that not every youth pastor makes an easy transition from years of doing ministry another way. They are accustomed to interacting with and planning for teens, but reaching out to parents is a foreign concept to many. Burns and DeVries see that scenario played out regularly: “Most of the youth workers I know are still trying to get a grasp of this important but elusive part of ministry. They know that families are important to the spiritual growth and well-being of their students, but they don’t know how to fit ministering to these families into their already overcommitted schedules” (Burns and DeVries 2003, 13). Youth ministry is already a time-consuming effort of planning and organizing events and programs, coordinating adult volunteers, and interacting with young people by teaching, visiting, attending their games and other events, etc. Many youth pastors may not understand how this crucial aspect of ministry can fit in and how it can be beneficial to the overall goal of the ministry – mature disciples.

Family-based youth ministry will also require youth ministers to understand families based on current data, not the nuclear family of the mid-twentieth century. Thus, Burns and DeVries write that to partner with parents effectively, “youth workers must become students of culture. Incredible changes have taken place in the family over the past few decades, and we must have an understanding of both the way families were in the past and the reasons for how they are today” (Burns and DeVries 2003, 31).

Burns and DeVries also know the understanding of how ministry to students could be multiplied through this model would encourage others to investigate it more closely: “Effective family-based youth ministry is about bringing the generations together in mutual respect and understanding. This will be accomplished through empowering and equipping parents to influence the spiritual development of their children and instilling in children a heartfelt respect for their parents” (Burns and DeVries 2003, 38). Youth ministers will have to see themselves as co-workers with parents for this approach to be effective, as Burns and DeVries explain: “We are partners with parents, not adversaries. Becoming a family-based ministry requires leaning into a relationship with parents based on mutual concern and care for our students – their children” (Burns and DeVries 2003, 53).

Transitioning to a family-based ministry is not an easy task, but those who believe this approach is the most productive approach to youth ministry are convinced it is worth the time and effort. Some who study this model may think that everything will have to change to embrace this new paradigm. Burns and DeVries quell this notion: “Let us say right now that your actual youth programming and events may not change much. Few family-based youth-ministry models that have dramatically changed their programming have worked well. Think of this strategy as *enhancing* your existing youth-ministry program, not completely renovating it” (Burns and DeVries 2003, 41). They

continue: “If we are truly to influence this generation, we must embrace a different way of looking at youth ministry. It is not about the programming. It has everything to do with spiritual formation. We must bring others into the process of spiritually forming children, realizing that both the nuclear family and the family of God have a profound impact in spiritual nurture and development” (Burns and DeVries 2003, 58).

Contemplative Youth Ministry

Mark Yaconelli writes about wanting to get away from the old model of ministry that relied on activities to draw larger and larger crowds to return to the practices that will take young people deeper in their faith in much more lasting ways. He created a project to test what he believed would lead to more enduring results in youth ministry: “The Youth Ministry and Spirituality Project was an experiment – an attempt to counter the isolation, hyperactivity, and emphasis on efficiency that plagues ministries with youth. It was a project that sought to resurrect the contemplative aspect of the Christian faith as an intervention to heal the more destructive aspects of the way youth ministry is often practiced within a North American context” (Yaconelli 2007, 258). Yaconelli was given an endowment to test this model in 15 churches from a variety of backgrounds and settings.

Michael Hryniuk, who worked with Yaconelli on the Youth Ministry and Spirituality Project, also focused on the need to move beyond what normally characterizes youth ministry in North America today: “Rather than focusing solely on how to ‘fill the space’ with pizza or dogma at a Sunday night youth group, we shift our attention to the deeper question of how to ‘create space for God’ in the daily lives of young persons through the disciplines of the spiritual life” (Hryniuk 2007, 61).

Kenda Creasy Dean also wrote about the need to go deeper, but focuses more on the kind of church that can appeal to young people and challenge them to deeper levels of faith maturity. She calls this kind of congregation the “passionate church”: “In the quest for a passionate church, young people prod us to be more than we have become. They ask only that we be who we say we are: people of Passion, who live for a love that is ‘to die for,’ and who ask them to do the same. Youth ministry so conceived transforms young people – but it also transforms the church” (Dean 2004, 257). She believes that if the church does not offer young people something that stirs their deepest passion, they will turn to whatever counterfeit passions the world offers them. Dean writes:

Unless Christian theology retains a central place for the Passion of Christ – and unless the Christian community engages youth in practices that identify with Jesus’ suffering love – youth looking for something ‘to die for’ will, inevitably, look elsewhere. In the absence of a Christian vocabulary of passion, youth will turn to the broader society to interpret their passions for them, where consumer culture is only too happy to oblige. (Dean 2004, 53)

Yaconelli’s study came to a few conclusions. First, the common current practice of youth ministry largely neglects the spiritual life of youth ministers, adult volunteers and the youth themselves. Next, people long to genuinely experience God in a very personal way in their own lives. Third, groups of committed adults, living lives characterized by prayer and Christian service, attract and reshape the lives of teenagers. Finally, young people long to experience God’s presence in their lives and desire to be transformed to live out His calling in their lives (Yaconelli 2007, 27-36).

According to Yaconelli, contemplative youth ministry is not a program, but a new focus: “The great secret we uncovered within our work was that youth leaders and youth have souls, and despite the conventional wisdom, these leaders and youth don’t need Christian rock bands, or amusement parks, or clever curricula. The secret we discovered is that what they need and desire is God” (Yaconelli 2007, 258). He says that

the spiritual practices can be better understood through reading and teaching, but they are only really known by experience. Michael Hryniuk agrees with Yaconelli:

“Contemplative ministry begins with God. It is a whole way of being, seeing, listening, and acting that flows out of an awareness of God’s presence in the moment. When Jesus speaks of having ‘eyes to see’ and ‘ears to hear,’ he is referring to such an awareness of God’s presence within us, around us, and between us. When we learn to live in and minister from such an awareness, the shift in our ministry paradigm can be quite dramatic” (Hryniuk 2007, 62).

Dean believes there is a resistance to this type of practice in the church today. She states, “Most mainline Protestants are put off by passion – both ours and God’s. Like lovers who kiss too much in public, religious passion embarrasses us. It is excessive, unseemly, over the top. It means losing control, being overtaken, becoming unleashed. It points to a God beyond our control who loves with abandon and who calls us to do the same” (Dean 2004, 68). Hryniuk writes that this approach in the church carries some implications for youth ministry: the imperative of entering into a disciplined life in the Spirit because a minister cannot give what he or she has not received; the need for youth ministers to be discerning, seeing how God’s Spirit is already at work in the lives of the young people with whom they work; and a commitment to accompaniment, which means supporting students as they search for their true selves in Christ (Hryniuk 2007, 71-73).

Many might think that proponents of this model advocate a total overhaul in the approach to youth ministry. But Hryniuk states otherwise: “Programs, activities, and events all have a place in this journey of ministry with youth. But what is most essential is the quality of *presence* we bring as ministers who know who we are and whose we are. When we are full of the knowledge of our own identity as God’s beloved children, then

we can freely trust that we are enough and that the Spirit of Christ is working in us and through us to name and claim them as God's own" (Hryniuk 2007, 73).

Dean suggests that adult leaders have to be committed to and practicing their faith with such depth and passion to be able to lead youth to do the same: "Rerouting youth ministry through the historic practices of the Christian community – those actions by which centuries of Christians have conformed to the Passion of Christ – establishes a sacred sense of direction in adolescents, transforming them into bearers of God's grace simply because love of this magnitude begs to be shared. But adolescents follow footprints better than blueprints" (Dean 2004, 175). While this approach to youth ministry may not be a complete redirection, it does involve a significant shift in direction and purpose, as suggested by Dean: "Understanding adolescents through a lens of Christian passion rather than through youth ministry's usual viewfinders (namely, educational, psychological, and social theory) suggests a very different course of action for the church if we hope to ignite faith and not just cheer wholesomeness" (Dean 2004, 253).

In his project, Yaconelli and his cohorts developed seven principles of contemplative youth ministry: Sabbath – sacred balance between work and rest; Prayer – intimacy with God; Covenant community – small groups sensing a common call to spiritual growth and ministry to youth; Accompaniment – adult believers joining students in living out authentic discipleship together; Discernment – responding to the leadership of the Holy Spirit; Hospitality – seeking full inclusion of young people and their gifts into every part of church life; Authentic action – reflecting God's mercy, justice, and peace (Yaconelli 2007, 83-86).

Dean's ideas for bringing about a passionate church are centered on Christian practices as well. These are the things ministry leaders and workers must demonstrate

and create. Using historic Christian practices of praying, giving, serving, resisting sin, witnessing, studying, worshipping, etc. as “vessels of grace” in Christian community is a way of establishing a theological and life framework upon which young people can build their lives. The art of “being there” is simply the ongoing interaction, fellowship, and informal teaching that takes place when adults and teens make themselves available to each other in many varied situations. It is practicing faith together. Another necessary part of this church transformation, Dean calls the “art of awe,” involves helping students and adults open their eyes to the transcendence of God and His work. The “art of intimacy” involves genuinely knowing and being known. Adolescents need to see the church at large model real intimacy for them on a consistent basis (Dean 2004, 145-245).

Achieving this type of ministry is not an easy, overnight task. But those who promote this model insist that it is absolutely necessary to accomplish what youth ministry should aim to accomplish. Dean makes a plea for this type of ministry: “A passionless church will never address passionate youth. It is highly questionable whether a passionless church addresses anybody, or if it even is the church in the first place. Christianity requires passion, and youth know it. Passion, both human and divine, challenges the language of modern rationalism, and ushers in a way of life that subverts the basic assumptions of an anesthetic culture with therapeutic goals” (Dean 2004, 69).

Yaconelli concludes that it may be very difficult to convince others of the value of this type of ministry and to find adults willing to commit themselves to this process: “After 10 years of researching contemplative youth ministry, I think it’s important to admit that contemplative youth ministry is probably the most difficult approach to youth ministry a church could undertake. In the distracted and fractured culture in which children and youth are being raised, it is becoming increasingly hard to find adults who have the time and willingness to be present to God and young people”

(Yaconelli 2007, 249). He admits that is a long process that does not produce the kind of instant results that many churches long to see produced with their young people.

Brian Richardson introduces some insight that may suggest why Yaconelli's model has not been widely accepted. First, Richardson writes that there are certainly scriptural foundations for various scriptural practices, but Yaconelli does not provide a biblical basis for this model for youth ministry. Also, this approach is very experience-oriented and seems to suggest that subjective experience of God is the only way someone can really know Him. Richardson emphasizes the importance of a firm grasp of scriptural truths as the source for knowing God. The next issue is that the basis for contemplative youth ministry may open students to a wide range of spiritual influences without providing the discernment to discover which are legitimate. The fourth issue raised by Richardson is that no advanced planning is a part of this model. Instead, decisions are made from week to week as leaders feel the Holy Spirit is leading. Can God's Spirit lead in advance to include purposeful planning? Finally, much of Yaconelli's criticism of traditional youth ministry is accurate, but, as Richardson points out, very few churches utilize the unaltered version of those models (Richardson 2000).

While the attention to spiritual disciplines and practices can be very valuable, ignoring other important aspects of youth ministry, as pointed out in other models, is shortsighted. Youth ministry can take some ideas from Yaconelli to enhance and add depth to their ministry with teens.

Conclusion to Youth Ministry Models

Different practitioners and educators have many different ideas about what makes youth ministry successful. In fact, the definition of success in youth ministry varies from person to person. Some think success is found in large numbers with

measurable results, such as salvations, young people involved in mission trips, Bible studies, etc., and the response of young people to entering full-time Christian service. Others will look at less measurable outcomes such as Christian maturity as seen in personal spiritual growth and practice. One hopes that both types of results will be evident and can coexist.

Even though the models discussed in this treatment differ in some ways, they contain some significant areas of overlap. They are all grown out of a desire to move beyond superficial results to facilitating genuine discipleship among young people. This growth is something that is intended to last well beyond their years in middle school and high school. It will be seen in continuing spiritual maturity in adulthood and, in part, in ongoing commitment to the local church. Each of these approaches seeks to reverse the trend of fallout from the church as youth reach the end of high school, but not just for the sake of keeping them connected to the church in attendance only, but to keep them as contributing, ministering members of the body of Christ.

In discussing youth from what they see as healthy churches, Overholt and Penner write, “Youth in these communities stated over and over that their group was a safe and fun place where they could make and bring friends, be themselves, explore God, and make a difference in their world. Each group had strategic, sacrificial, and caring adults present” (Overholt and Penner 2002, 13). In all four of these models, the presence of caring, spiritually mature adult leaders is a necessity. Duerksen agrees with this assessment: “Adolescents, particularly, need friendship with an adult who sees in them potential they do not necessarily see in themselves. Studies consistently show that a relationship with such an ‘adult guarantor’ has the most positive influence on overall youth development of all the forms of youth ministry” (Duerksen 2001, 33).

The focus given to making youth ministry better today and helping it become the shaping tool it is intended to be in the lives of teenagers is a very positive sign. Although some may see one approach as better than others, there is a clear sense that most of them share the same aim of bringing about a deeper spiritual life patterned after biblical Christianity. That desire, if acted upon, will help move the practice of youth ministry in the right direction.

Brian Richardson sums up the critical issue in choosing a model of youth ministry: “As a church considers what model of youth ministry it should use, it is important to remember that what is best for one church in a given community is not necessarily best for another church. Instead of copying a particular youth model because it worked somewhere, a wiser approach is to respond to the specific needs of the young people in our church or community” (Richardson 2000). Youth ministers should not feel that once they choose a model that they believe will work best in their setting, that they cannot incorporate ideas from other models as well. Most church youth ministries will (and probably should) reflect some elements from different models.

Profile of the Current Study

The review of existing research and literature has shaped this present study in various ways. First, recognition must be made that most students who participated in church during their teenage years are leaving the church at or near the end of high school. This alarming exodus leaves a gap in the body of Christ which means it cannot be as effective as possible at accomplishing what God intends for his church to accomplish. The research demonstrates that this dilemma is an accepted fact among many different denominations. Though the percentages vary, most groups report that a majority of their young people leave (Powell and Kubiak 2005, 51).

The Bible presents a convincingly strong case for involvement in a local congregation. In fact, the New Testament assumes that being a follower of Christ is synonymous with being an active part of the local body of Christ. In his discussion of that body, the Apostle Paul made it clear that Christians cannot function on their own. They need the body and the body needs them. It is also evident that spiritual growth does not happen for Christians in a vacuum. The congregation grows together in unity (Eph 4:11-13). It is easy to understand why all Christians are exhorted not to neglect local church participation (Heb 10:25). There is also outside support for the importance of relationships in human development, particularly in the realm of faith development. The local church is a prime organization for those partnerships to occur.

Since the departure of young people from the local church is the concern of this study, it is critical to have some understanding of this period of adolescence. The review has demonstrated that adolescence and young adulthood are critical periods of transition as young people stand on the threshold of full-fledged adulthood. Especially as it concerns faith development, these young people must personalize their faith, not in the sense of it being an individual, subjective faith, but in knowing the source and substance of their faith. Thus it is crucial to understand the major spiritual influences that impact their lives during this time of great transition, namely the importance of relationships with their parents, Christian peers, and other significant adults within the church (Lamport 1990; Dudley 1999; Barna 2001; Smith and Denton 2005). They also need to be able to exercise their gifts and abilities, not only in ministries to their age group, but also in the church body as a whole (Strommen, Jones, and Rahn 2001, 186-87).

Studies have also been conducted to help understand the phenomenon of those who leave the church and then return at some point during their young adult years. Family stages and other life-change events seem to play a significant role in their re-

connection to a local church. Wesley Black's study was especially significant in exploring the spiritual influences of young adults and their perceptions on why those of their age group are involved or uninvolved in the local church. His work focused on both those who are currently active in church participation and those who are not.

Because of the concern about young people leaving the church, educators, youth ministry practitioners, and others have examined the current state of youth ministry and its weaknesses. This review has highlighted various youth ministry models that have been proposed to correct the shortcomings of the status quo practice of this ministry. Some of the proponents of purpose-driven, family-based, congregational, and contemplative youth ministry have been examined. This review has concluded that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to ministry with students that will overcome all the weaknesses currently found in youth ministry. Though there are evident deficiencies in these various models, all of them offer positive insights and principals that can enhance the work of churches in this field.

Also in response to the concern about this issue of teens "graduating" from church when they graduate from high school, Wesley Black developed an instrument, the Lasting Faith Scale (LFS) that measures the propensity of young people to stay involved in the local church after high school. His survey is based on his own research and that of others revealing four domains of influence that impact the lasting faith tendency of young people. It is vital for youth pastors to understand these influences and to be able to gauge their own ministries' effectiveness in enhancing their influence in this area. They are on the front lines of this very consequential battle for the spiritual lives of young people and the health of local congregations. But do they have an accurate view of the lasting faith tendency of their students? How would they believe their own youth groups would score on Black's LFS?

The purpose of this research, therefore, was to use Wesley Black's Lasting Faith Scale (LFS) to compare the lasting faith tendency of youth (reflected by their LFS scores) with what their youth ministers believe will be their groups' LFS scores. LFS responses were also evaluated for the effects on scores of the four domains of influence – discipleship and spiritual depth; family; mentoring and intergenerational influences; and peer relationships.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

Kara Powell and Krista Kubiak write that various denominations estimate the dropout rate of young people from church after high school to be between 65% and 94% (Powell and Kubiak 2005, 51). The reasons vary, but the exodus is obvious. Some church leaders may expect the diminished participation of this age group and categorize it as a normal part of this developmental stage. But the non-involvement of these young people should warrant concern among church leaders. Mark Regnerus' study of adolescent religious behavior reveals that although 76% of teens claim to believe in a personal God, only 31% attend weekly religious services (Regnerus 2003, 7). If less than a third of adolescents are attending local churches on a weekly basis, then the diminishing of this number as they move into adulthood is an issue that must be addressed. If they do not stay connected to local congregations, then the churches cannot continue to affect their level of discipleship and spiritual maturity.

As summarized in chapter 2, recent research of adolescents sheds light on the factors that influence their spiritual lives the most. New models of youth ministry have been promoted that may hold more promise for long-term spiritual growth among young people and be more likely to keep them connected to the local church after high school. But are youth ministers aware of this research? Are they really concerned about the long-term spiritual impact of their ministries or are they simply seeking to boost their numbers with larger groups while these students are a part of their ministries? Does the available

research have any effect on their youth ministry practice? Do they have an accurate understanding of the students with whom they work and their tendency toward continued church involvement after high school?

This chapter describes the methods that were used to utilize Wesley Black's Lasting Faith Scale (LFS) to compare the lasting faith tendency of youth (reflected by their LFS scores) with what their youth ministers believe will be their groups' LFS scores. LFS responses were also evaluated for the effects on scores of the four domains of influence – discipleship and spiritual depth; family; mentoring and intergenerational influences; and peer relationships.

Research Question Synopsis

The following questions were used to guide the gathering and analysis of data for this study:

1. What is the relationship of the lasting faith tendency of the youth respondents to their experience of discipleship and spiritual depth?
2. What is the relationship of the lasting faith tendency of the youth respondents to their family influence?
3. What is the relationship of the lasting faith tendency of the youth respondents to their mentoring and intergenerational influences?
4. What is the relationship of the lasting faith tendency of the youth respondents to their peer influences?
5. How do the Lasting Faith Scale (LFS) scores of the youth respondents compare with how their youth ministers believe their groups will score on the LFS?

Design Overview

Permission was attained to survey full time youth ministers and their youth groups from Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) churches affiliated with the Kentucky Baptist Convention (KBC) and the South Carolina Baptist Convention (SCBC). A letter

(Appendix 1) was sent to each convention office inviting the full time youth ministers to participate, along with their youth groups. The research was briefly explained and a link to the Web site hosting an electronic survey was included. These letters were sent, via e-mail, from each of the convention offices to all full time youth pastors in each state convention. The online survey should have taken no more than 15 minutes to complete. Appendix 1 also contains the letters that were sent as reminders to the youth pastors to increase participation.

The instrument used to collect the necessary data was the Lasting Faith Scale (LFS) developed by Wesley Black (Appendix 2). The LFS was created from his research with young adults regarding their reasons for church involvement or non-involvement (Black 2008, in publication). The instrument consists of 30, six-point Likert scale items. There are five demographic questions included to determine students' home situation and their personal identification with Jesus Christ.

Population

This research involved two distinct, but related, populations. The first population for this study consists of full time youth ministers from Kentucky Baptist Convention (KBC) and South Carolina Baptist Convention (SCBC) churches. The second population is made up of all middle and high school students in the youth groups of these full time youth ministers.

The total number of full time youth ministers in both states, at the time of this study, was estimated to be 440 (180 in the KBC; 260 in the SCBC). Although the numbers are extremely difficult to estimate, there were approximately 25,900 middle and high school students in these same churches (9,900 in the KBC; 16,000 in the SCBC – based on loose estimates from the state convention offices).

Sample and Delimitations of the Sample

All youth ministers of the population for this research were encouraged to participate in the LFS survey. All these youth ministers were asked to encourage all middle and high school students in their youth groups to take the LFS survey as well.

The goal of the researcher was to achieve a 50% rate of response, or approximately 220 surveys completed, by full time youth ministers. A 10% rate of response was desired from students in the churches of these full time youth ministers.

Limitations of Generalization

The findings of this study might not generalize to part time or volunteer youth ministers and their youth groups in Kentucky and South Carolina. They might not generalize to churches or ministries not associated with the KBC or the SCBC. They might not generalize to churches that do not employ full time youth ministers. The findings apply directly to those youth ministers and youth groups who agree to participate in the LFS survey for this research.

No claim can be made that the results of this study will be generalizable beyond the boundaries set forth, but the findings will hopefully provide insight that will be applicable beyond the specific scope of this research. This researcher believes that the variety of youth ministers and youth groups, and the churches they represent, will provide information that will be valuable across a much broader population. This study will also provide a model that can be easily replicated in different regions and denominations as well as in parachurch organizations.

Instrumentation

The research instrument used for this study was the Lasting Faith Scale (LFS) (Appendix 2) developed by Wesley Black based on the results of his research, The Faith

Journey of Young Adults (FJYA) concerning young adults' reasons for attending or not attending church (Black 2006). The LFS was generated to measure the propensity of young people to stay involved in the local church after high school (Black 2008, in publication).

The LFS is comprised of 30, 6-point Likert scale items. The response possibilities are as follows: *NO!* = I strongly disagree, or this is not true for me at all; *No* = I disagree, or this is not true for me most of the time; *no* = I slightly disagree, or this is not true for me just over half the time; *yes* = I slightly agree, or this is true for me just over half the time; *Yes* = I agree, or this is true for me most of the time; *YES!* = I strongly agree, or this is true for me all the time (Black 2008, 56). There are also 5 demographic items that deal with a student's living arrangements, relationship to parents, and relationship to Jesus Christ.

The research results from the FJYA study indicate 4 domains of influence that impact ongoing church participation after high school. These became the theoretical framework for the LFS. The 4 domains are discipleship and spiritual depth, family influences, mentoring and intergenerational influences, and peer relationships. These were tested utilizing factor analysis for the possibility of subscales. Principle axis factoring, with iteration, with Promax rotation, and a minimum loading value of .35 was used to extract 7 factors to achieve simplicity. According to Black, "The seven factors contained scale items that closely resemble the theoretical framework of the Lasting Faith Scale" (Black 2008, 55). As seen in Table 1, loading ranged from .363 to .964 for all items except for 17, 18, 20, and 24 which are shown as non-loading scale items.

Table 1. Lasting Faith Scale subscales

Subscales

Code	Factor 1 "Personal faith"	Loading
D	1. I often have the opportunity to use my skills and talents to help out in my church or youth group	0.509
D	2. Most of my decisions are based on what I believe God wants me to do with my life.	0.625
D	3. I enjoy reading the Bible outside of church	0.660
D	7. I often talk to a Christian friend about my faith	0.487
D	8. The sermons in our church and/or youth group mean a lot to me.	0.437

Code	Factor 2 "Father's faith"	Loading
F	12. My FATHER attends church two or more times a month.	0.742
F	13. I would describe the spiritual life of my FATHER as a sincere Christian faith.	0.964
F	14. People consider my FATHER as an active leader in our church.	0.636

Code	Factor 3 "Mother's faith"	Loading
F	9. My MOTHER attends church two or more times a month.	0.772
F	10. I would describe the spiritual life of my MOTHER as a sincere Christian faith.	0.667
F	11. People consider my MOTHER as an active leader in our church	0.809

Code	Factor 4 "Church influences"	Loading
D	4. I don't think about God much outside of church or youth group (reverse scored)	0.587
D	5. If it were completely up to me and my parents did not care, I would attend church or youth group activities LESS often than I do now (reverse scored)	0.558
D	6. The people at my church do not allow me to think for myself (reverse scored)	0.682
R	25. Most of the friends of my family DO NOT go to church (reverse scored)	0.400
R	28. I do not have any real friends at church (reverse scored)	0.449
R	29. Church leaders are too concerned with church programs and events and NOT concerned with people (reverse scored)	0.562

Code	Factor 5 "Friends' faith"	Loading
R	23. I enjoy spending time with my church friends outside of church activities	0.534
R	26. My closest friend(s) attend(s) church or youth group two times a month or more	0.906
R	27. In general, most of my closest friends have a sincere, Christian faith.	0.604

Table 1 – Continued. Lasting Faith Scale subscales

Code	Factor 6 “Mentoring relationships”	Loading
M	19. Adults in our church are spiritually mature.	0.585
M	21. I look up to the leadership of our main youth leader.	0.363
M	22. I often pay attention to the advice I get from adults other than my parents.	0.434

Code	Factor 7 “Home and family influences”	Loading
F	15. In my home, we often have discussions, involving me and either or both of my parents, about our faith.	0.556
F	16. My parents spend time helping me know how to make right decisions.	0.518
R	30. My friends tend to follow my suggestions about things to do together	0.398

Code	Non-loading scale items
M	17. When I think of current adults (whether Christian or non-Christian) whom I respect and look up to (teacher, coach, employer, neighbor, etc.), in general I would describe their spiritual life as a sincere Christian faith.
M	18. I know two or more adult Christians (other than my parents) who know my name.
M	20. Most of my adult relatives (other than my parents) encourage my Christian beliefs.
R	24. I believe it's important to choose friends who are Christians

Theoretical Framework:

Discipleship and spiritual depth (code D), items 1-8

Family influence (code F), items 9-16

Mentoring and intergenerational influences (code M), items 17-22

Relationships influences (code R), items 23-30

(Black 2008, 62-63)

The validity and reliability study of the LFS was published in the Spring 2008 issue of *The Journal of Youth Ministry*. Input from a 14-member panel of youth ministry experts provided validity checks for clarity and strength of the scale items.

Students at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary helped conduct pilot tests for this instrument by gathering data from their youth groups. Data from 121 teenagers came from their responses to the original 80 items in the survey and from their suggestions for clarifying the items. They were invited to add comments in the margins,

mark unclear wording, and make suggestions. Their feedback and the feedback of the expert panel reduced the instrument to 33 items.

Internal consistency was evaluated using item-total analysis, in which each survey item was correlated with the total LFS score, and Cronbach's alpha statistic, in which every item was tested in relationship to every other item. Every scale item with a correlation below .30 was deleted, which brought the final total to 30 scale items.

The instrument was shown to be internally reliable through two testing applications of the scale ($n=481$, $\alpha = .869$; and $n=463$, $\alpha = .867$). Test-retest reliability was verified through two administrations with match pairs using Pearson's r ($n = 78$, $r = .851$) (Black 2008, 59).

Various demographic questions were asked during the testing phase. Gender, age, and whether or not a young person has siblings were determined to be non-significant to LFS scores. Other demographic items were determined to be significant to LFS scores. They were: "What is the marital status of your birth parents?"; "Whom do you live with most of the time?"; "Which parent do you most closely identify with?"; "Which parent do you most respect related to spiritual matters?"; and "When I think about Jesus Christ I identify with him primarily as [respondents are given 4 choices]" (Black 2008, 60-62).

The strength of the LFS is demonstrated in the reliability and validity testing as discussed. The LFS is also a brief and easily accessed online instrument that is designed to address research concerns of particular interest to youth ministry educators (Lambert 2004, 87). The process of registering for and completing the survey has been refined during the testing phase and through the participation of miscellaneous respondents. Another strength of the LFS is the input of a variety of competent consultants in the 14-member expert panel. The greatest strength of this instrument is what it will provide. In

a peer review correspondence about the development of the LFS, the reviewer writes, “the tool proposed in this article will help serve the church, youth workers and parents by giving researchers objective data to better understand the problem and therefore work to fix it” (Peer review 2008).

The primary weakness of the LFS is that it is a new instrument. This weakness will fade with further use. To this point, its only use has been in the testing phase and by random youth groups. This makes it more difficult to interpret the LFS scores. What the scores reveal now is that the higher the LFS score, the greater the tendency for that student to stay involved in church after high school. Further use and longitudinal studies of the LFS respondents will provide more insight into the meaning of the numerical values of the scores. But, according to the peer review of Black’s article, “it will take many years to get reliable resulting information” (Peer review 2008). Black is already obtaining permission from high school students who have participated in the LFS to do follow-up survey with them about their church attendance patterns following high school graduation (Black 2008, 65-66). This current research will expand the base of students for possible further study.

Procedures

Permission was granted from the Kentucky Baptist Convention (KBC) and the South Carolina Baptist Convention (SCBC) to survey full time youth ministers in the Southern Baptist churches in their states. The letters soliciting participation in the LFS are included in Appendix 1. The first letter was sent via e-mail by each state convention to all full time youth ministers (for which e-mail addresses were available). The state convention offices did not allow outside access to their e-mail lists, so invitations to participate were drafted by the researcher and forwarded to the KBC and SCBC for

distribution to youth pastors. To elicit better participation, all youth ministers who had at least 15 of their youth group members take the LFS survey were entered into a drawing to win a new iPod or iPhone 3G.

In the beginning stage of this research, youth ministers were provided with a link to Black's LFS Web site (www.lastingfaithscale.com) where they were to register their groups for the survey. They would then wait for Black to provide them with two codes with which to take the actual survey. One was to be used by the youth pastor and the other by all his or her students. They were also instructed to provide their students with an informed consent page in keeping with Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's *Ethics Committee Guidelines For Conducting Human Research*. These forms were to be mailed back to the researcher.

After approximately one month and very few responses, permission was obtained from Black to reproduce the LFS on the Web site www.surveymonkey.com. All students were taken to an informed consent page and could not begin the survey until the page was completed. This involved their parents or guardians entering their own information in order to demonstrate their permission for their young person's participation in the survey. This greatly simplified the survey process. (The letters in Appendix 2 are those sent after the [surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com) survey was in place.) A total of 387 young people began the LFS but only 191 completed the survey. Nearly 46% of students who began dropped out of participation at the informed consent page of the LFS. In one instance, the researcher was informed by a youth minister that the parents of his students were leery of a survey for which they had to give their permission. Another church's lawyer informed the youth pastor not to administer the LFS to their students because of the informed consent requirement.

Letters e-mailed to the youth ministers contained a link to the survey. This link was to be provided to all the students in each youth minister's church. Most were distributed via e-mail, but some youth pastors utilized social networking sites frequented by their students such as Facebook or MySpace.

The survey period for this research lasted from July through November 2008. Two reminders were sent to all the youth ministers during the survey period to encourage more participation. Most youth pastors who completed the LFS provided their e-mail address to the researcher. This information was utilized to send two additional e-mails to these participants to encourage them to solicit additional participation from their youth. SCBC youth ministers were talked to personally during state convention youth ministry lunch meetings and at state convention summer youth camps to encourage their involvement. KBC youth pastors attending the KBC state convention were personally encouraged to be involved in this. The researcher, utilizing information found online at KBC's Web site and at individual church Web sites, personally called many full time KBC youth ministers to enlist their participation. All correspondence reminded youth pastors of the iPod or iPhone 3G drawing for those with at least 15 students completing the LFS. Every known means of soliciting participation in this research was utilized by the researcher to gain a higher rate of response.

All data collected was downloaded to an Excel spreadsheet by the researcher for analysis with the assistance of a statistician. All surveys were reviewed and any incomplete surveys were not included in the final analysis process.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this research was to use Wesley Black's Lasting Faith Scale (LFS) to compare the lasting faith tendency of youth (reflected by their LFS scores) with what their youth ministers believe will be their groups' LFS scores. LFS responses were also evaluated for the effects on scores of the four domains of influence – discipleship and spiritual depth; family; mentoring and intergenerational influences; and peer relationships. The participants consisted of youth ministers and youth groups as described in the “Population” and “Sample” sections of chapter 3.

Compilation Protocol

The data for this study was collected with the Lasting Faith Scale (LFS) (Appendix 2), an online survey instrument. Youth ministers were invited to participate via e-mail and were provided a direct link to the LFS survey at surveymonkey.com. Youth ministers were asked to provide the survey link to the students participating in their local church ministries. The survey period ran from July through November 2008. All participants were required to complete the LFS for their responses to be included in the analysis. Any incomplete surveys were removed from the analysis. Those surveys from respondents outside of Kentucky and South Carolina also were not included.

All completed surveys were scored using syntax in SPSS statistical computer software. Of the 30 items on the LFS, items 4, 5, 6, 25, 28, and 29 were reverse scored. With the assistance of a statistician, analysis began with the determination of

demographic factors and the calculation of means, standard deviations, frequency counts and percentages related to the LFS scores of youth ministers and youth.

Preliminary analysis was performed on the LFS data beginning with factor analysis of the survey items for comparison with Black's results when he tested the LFS. Investigation of the scales enabled the researcher to determine if the scales for this research with the LFS were the same as Black's. The creation of this instrument was based on his research and what he called the four domains of influence. These were discipleship and spiritual depth, family influences, mentoring and intergenerational influences, and peer relationships (Black 2008, 55). Using the same methodology as Black (extraction method – Principal Axis Factoring; rotation method – Promax with Kaiser Normalization), seven factors were discovered to be significant. Black's analysis also yielded seven factors (Black 2008, 62-65).

Internal consistency reliability of the LFS was tested for students (n=191) using Chronbach's Alpha. Reliability was strong for the overall LFS (.894) and for three of the four subscales. Reliability of the discipleship and spiritual depth scale showed a Chronbach's Alpha of .833. The family influences scale scored .883 and the relationships scale was .776. The mentoring and intergenerational influences scale had a Chronbach's Alpha of .659. While lower than the others, it was sufficiently internally consistent to warrant its use in the study.

Scale distributions were run on the student sample and were found to be skewed. Skewness corrections were made to show a fairly normal distribution of scores on the LFS.

Pearson correlations between the four LFS subscales (domains of influence) were run for the purposes of addressing research questions 1-4. Matched analysis was completed with the 12 churches that had at least five students complete the LFS. It is

important to remember that youth pastors were asked to respond to the LFS the way they believed their youth, in general, would respond. The mean of the LFS scores of the youth pastors from those 12 churches was compared to the mean of the LFS scores of the youth from those same 12 churches. Using paired sample t-tests, the significance of the difference in these scores was determined for overall LFS scores and for each of the four subscales. To compare the results of this test, independent sample t-tests were run with all students completing the LFS and with all youth ministers completing the survey.

Finally, comparisons were made between the four scales and the significant demographic differences. T-tests were used to determine differences by gender and Pearson correlations to test for significant differences by age. The significance of these differences was measured utilizing a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and post hoc pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni adjustment.

Characteristics of the Samples

The samples for this research represent two distinct but related populations. The first population is comprised of all full-time youth ministers with churches in the Kentucky Baptist Convention (KBC) and the South Carolina Baptist Convention (SCBC). All members of the population were targeted for participation in this study. At the beginning of the research process, the estimated size of this population was 440 (180 in the KBC, 260 in the SCBC). Figure 1 shows that the sample utilized for this study was made up of all members of the population who completed the LFS survey. The data analysis included 81 youth ministers (36 from Kentucky; 45 from South Carolina). This sample was just over 18% of the population. Twenty percent of full time KBC youth pastors and just over 17% of full time SCBC youth pastors were included in the final

analysis. No other demographic data was collected on youth ministers other than church name and location.

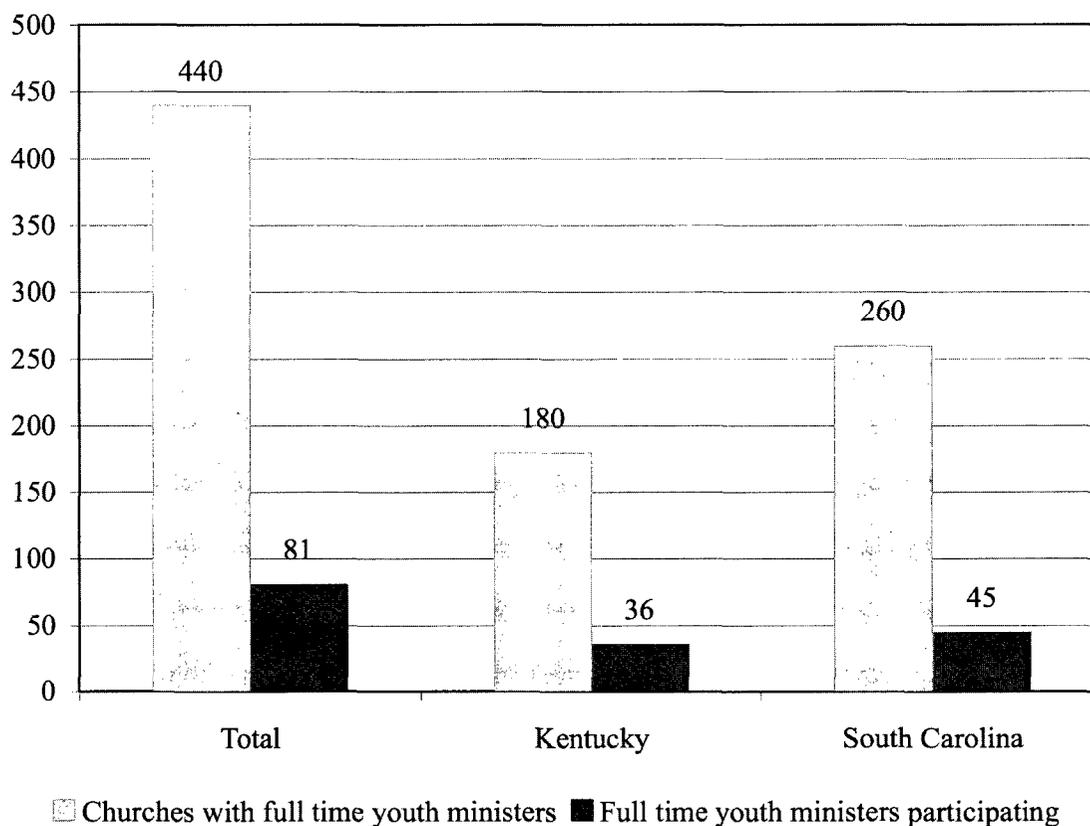


Figure 1. Youth minister population and sample

The other population in this study was comprised of the youth (middle and high school students) associated with the churches with full-time youth ministers in the KBC and the SCBC. Neither state convention had clear statistics for the numbers of students this involved. A very loose estimation was 25,900 youth (9,900 from the KBC; 16,000 from the SCBC), but because of the uncertain nature of this guess, the figure was not used for any analysis in the study. The sample consists of those students who responded based on their participation with one of the churches from the targeted population.

Student Demographics

A total of 191 students completed the LFS for this research (119 from Kentucky, 72 from South Carolina). Although 387 youth began the LFS, just under 50% of those students completed the survey. The very first information collected on the LFS was whether the participant was a youth minister or a student. All those choosing “student” were taken directly to the informed consent page as required by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary’s *Ethics Committee Guidelines for Conducting Human Research*. At that point, 177 (46%) youth dropped out of participation. Another 19 students were removed from analysis because they were from a state other than Kentucky or South Carolina or because they did not complete the LFS. Fewer than half (49%) of the students who began the LFS were used for data analysis (see Figure 2).

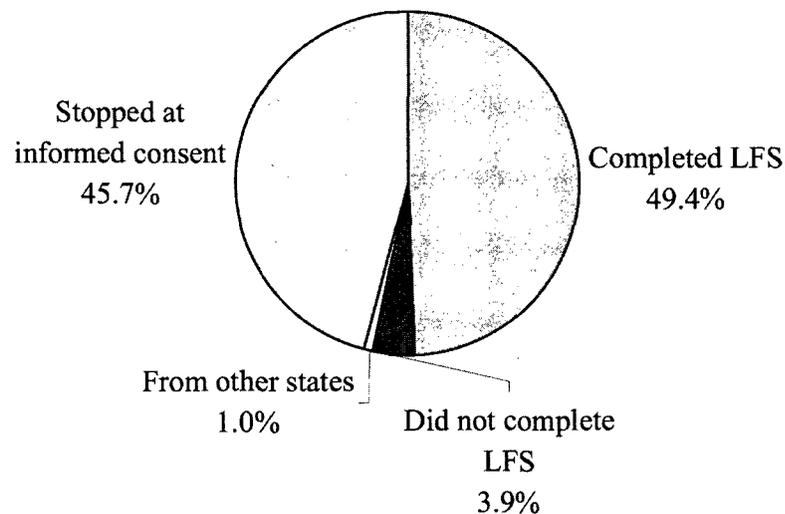


Figure 2. Student participation in the LFS

Several demographic questions were asked of all students. They were asked to provide their gender, age, church name, and church location. They were also asked to classify the marital status of their parents, whom they live with most of the time, which parent they most closely identify with, which parent they most respect related to spiritual

matters, and how they identify with Jesus Christ. For each of these items, the youth were asked to choose one of multiple options.

Of the 191 students who completed the LFS, 124 were female and 67 were male (Figure 3). The age distribution of these students is shown in Figure 4. The divisions for age were: under 12, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19 plus.

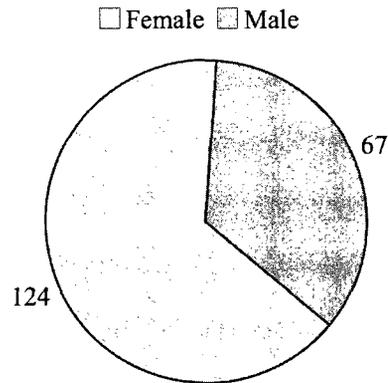


Figure 3. Student gender

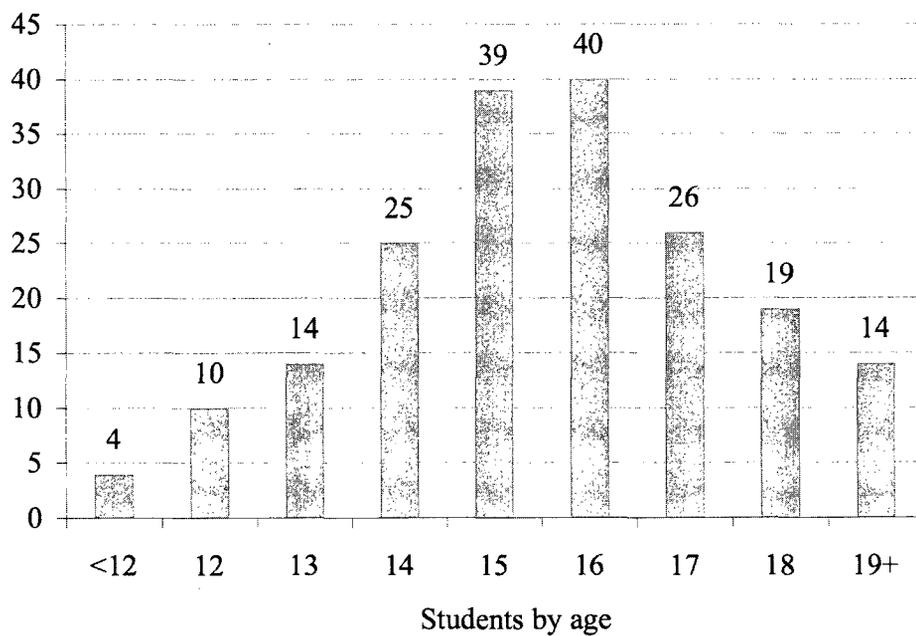


Figure 4. Student age distribution

Church names and cities will be kept confidential in this research along with participant names. The only location information that is being made available is the number of students from each state (119 from Kentucky, 72 from South Carolina), gender, and age category.

In answering the question concerning the marital status of their birth parents, 69.6% of students responded that their parents were married. Other choices were “Divorced” and “Other (separated, widowed, never married, unknown or I am adopted).” Those choosing those responses were 17.3% and 13.1% of the students respectively (Figure 5).

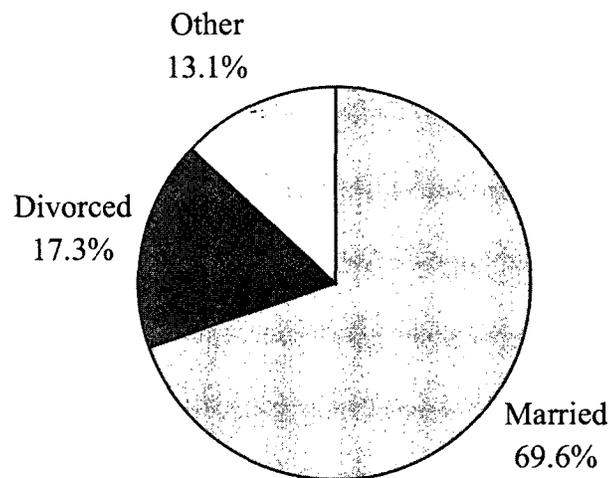


Figure 5. Parents' marital status

When asked “Whom do you live with most of the time?” 74.9% of participating youth chose “Both mother and father.” Other choices made by students were “Mother only” (7.3%), “Father only” (0.5%), “Birth mother and step-father” (11.5%), “Birth father and step-mother” (2.1%), and “Other (grandparent(s), foster or step-parents, adoptive parent(s), etc.)” (3.7%) (Figure 6).

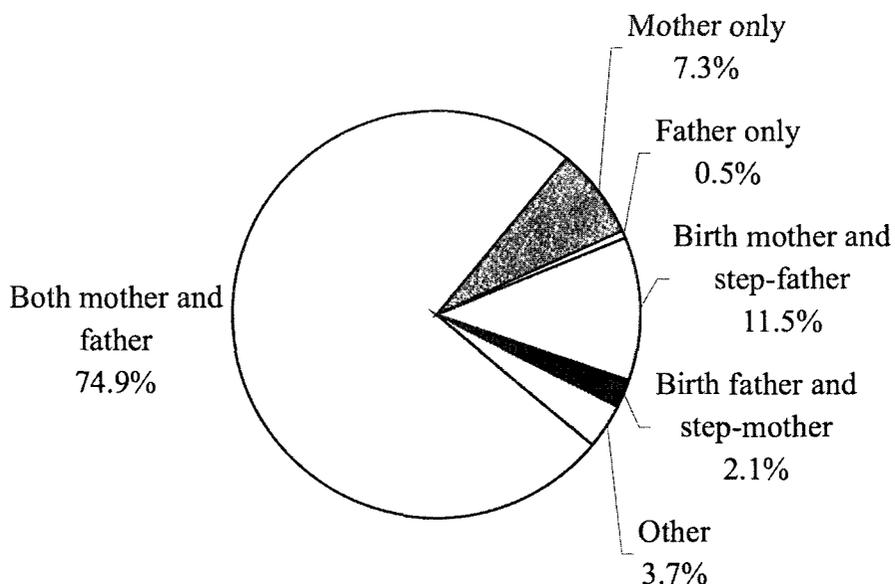


Figure 6. Students' living arrangements

The question, "Which parent do you most closely identify with?" did not show such a significant difference between the various choices. The greatest number of students chose "Both parents equally" (40.3%). Those who chose "Mother" (34.6%) were next, followed by "Father" (18.3%). Seventeen youth chose "Neither" (6.8%) (Figure 7).

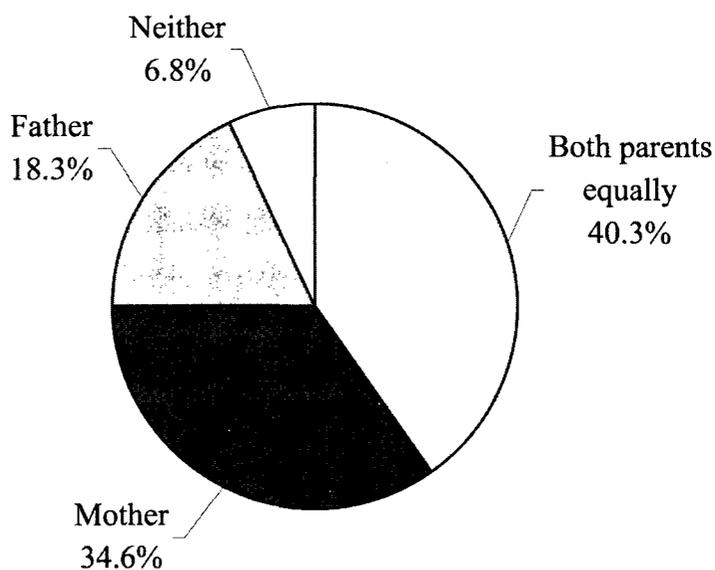


Figure 7. Parent students most identify with

Students were asked which parent they respect most regarding spiritual matters. Figure 8 shows that nearly half (47.1%) responded “Both parents equally.” The choice “Mother only” was made by 24.1% of the respondents. The remaining choices, “Father only” and “Neither parent,” were chosen by 14.7% and 14.1% of the students respectively.

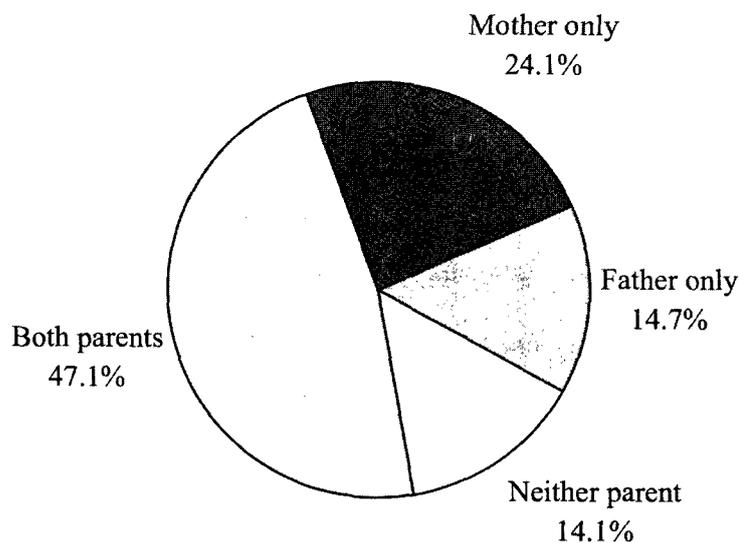


Figure 8. Parent students most respect in spiritual matters

The final demographic item was, “When I think about Jesus Christ, I identify with him primarily as:” The choice “My personal Savior” was chosen by three-fourths (74.9%) of participating students. “An example to be followed” was chosen by 9.4% and “The Son of God” was the choice of 14.7%. Only 2 participants (1.0%) chose “No meaningful relationship” (Figure 9).

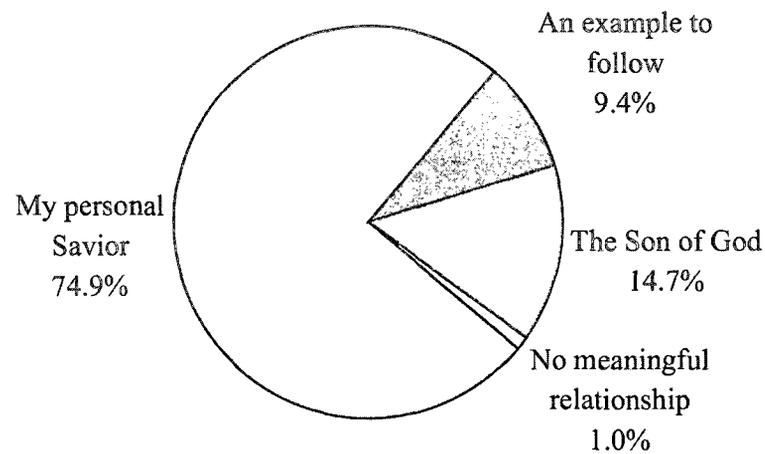


Figure 9. Students' identification with Jesus Christ

Matched Youth Ministers and Youth

Only churches with at least five youth completing the LFS were included in matched church analysis in which youth ministers' LFS scores were compared with the scores of youth from the same set of churches. Figure 10 illustrates that although 81 youth ministers completed the survey, only 12 of them were utilized for matched analysis. Fifty-one youth ministers did not have any students from their churches complete the LFS. The rest had only one to four students who completed the survey. Five churches had two youth ministers complete the LFS. The mean of their scores was utilized for comparison if they had at least 5 youth complete the survey.

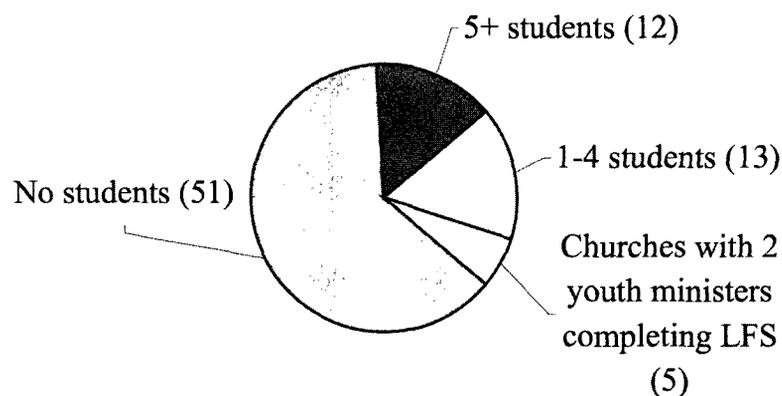


Figure 10. Youth ministers' students completing the LFS

Preliminary Analysis

Since the LFS is a relatively new instrument and has not been utilized extensively in research, a factor analysis and internal consistency reliability analysis were performed to determine if the results would be similar to what Black discovered in his testing phase (see Table 1 on page 74). The same methods used by Black were employed for this study.

Factor Analysis

A test for total variance was run (n=191) for the 30 items of the LFS. By choosing the factors with an eigenvalue greater than 1.0, seven factors were shown to make up the subscales for this research. These seven factors explain 63.9% of the differences in the original items. This is consistent with Black's results (Black 2008, 63-65).

The 7 factors were then utilized for principal axis factoring. Promax rotation method with Kaiser normalization was used. A minimum loading value of .35 was used for consistency with Black's analysis. In this study, there are some overlaps with Black's results and some differences. The researcher interpreted the factors by the items that fell most strongly into various categories. The factors, in this case, are slightly different than Black's but very closely related. The factors for this research have been named personal faith, mother's faith/family, father's faith, church leadership influence, mentoring relationships, church relationships, and friends' faith. These factors fit into Black's four domains of influence. In this study, the domains of influence that are harder to distinguish in the placement of the factors are mentoring and intergenerational influences and relationships influences. The factors that fit under discipleship and spiritual depth and family influences were clear. Table 2 illustrates this analysis.

Table 2. LFS factor coefficients

Domains of Influence							
Discipleship and spiritual depth	Family influence			Mentoring and intergenerational influences		Peer influences	
Factors	Personal Faith	Mother's faith/family	Father's faith	Church leadership influence	Mentoring relationships	Church relationships	Friends' faith
LFS Item							
3	0.904						
2	0.748						
7	0.660						
24	0.609						
R5	0.589						
17	0.516						
R4	0.499						
8	0.481			0.356			
1	0.412						
23	0.393					0.350	
18							
10		0.844					
11		0.726					
9		0.581					
15	0.371	0.571					
16		0.491					
R25		0.486				0.389	
12			0.901				
13			0.821				
14			0.796				
19				0.828			
R29				0.552			
21				0.480			
R6				0.465			
R28						0.842	
30					0.497		
22					0.496		
20					0.366		
26							0.548
27	0.375						0.542

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

Rotation Method: Promax with Kaiser Normalization.

("R" before item # indicates the item was reverse scored)

Black's first factor, "personal faith," included items 1, 2, 3, 7, and 8. While this analysis included those, it added items 4 and 5, which Black included under the "church influences" factor, items 17 and 24, which he showed as being non-loading scale items, and item 23, which was in his "friends' faith" factor. This researcher kept the factor name "personal faith" because all items included reflect a student's personal choice regarding faith matters, whether in terms of personal habits, choices about church attendance, or Christian friends.

In the family influences factors for this data (mother's faith/family and father's faith), the items related directly to respondents' parents were consistent with Black's factors. This analysis added two items (15 and 16) that Black showed under his "home and family influences" to the other items grouped under "mother's faith/family." This analysis grouped family influence together with the mothers' influence and separate from the fathers' influence. Item 25 was also included in this grouping, while Black placed it under "church influences." With this data, family and home influence is more closely related to mother's influence.

Items 6, 19, 21, and 29 grouped together under the "church leadership influence" factor. Black's test placed items 6 and 29 under "church influences" and items 19 and 21 under "mentoring relationships." These factors are closely related since Black's "mentoring relationships" are related to students' interaction with adults in the local church. Items 20, 22, and 30 came under the "mentoring" factor for this study. Black showed item 20 as non-loading and item 30 under "home and family influences." There is a distinction in the groupings between "church leadership influence" and "mentoring." The former items are related directly to adults at the church, while the latter involves friends and adults not necessarily related to the church.

The factors entitled “church relationships” and “friends’ faith” contained items 23, 25, 26, 27, and 28. Items 23 and 25 loaded slightly higher under other factors as well but were strong enough to be included here. As stated earlier, the items grouped under the domains “mentoring and intergenerational influences” and “peer influences” were not as distinguished in their groupings as were the other two domains. This could be because most of these items were related to the local church as well as to adult relationships and peer relationships. All of these involve peer relationships, but items 23, 25, and 28 are about friends at the respondents’ own local churches.

Although there are some differences between Black’s analysis and the factor analysis for this research, both clearly showed seven factors when the same tests were utilized on each sample. While there are minor differences in the grouping under the factors, and this researcher assigned more appropriate factor titles for this data, they are very similar to Black’s conclusions.

Internal Consistency Reliability

Internal consistency reliability was measured using item-total analysis, in which every LFS item was correlated with the total LFS score, and Cronbach’s alpha statistic, in which every scale item was tested in relationship to every other item. The reliability of the 30 items in the LFS (n=191) had an alpha of .894 (Table 3). The internal reliability of this instrument will be much more adequately measured after it is utilized more and retested with other samples. Black also tested for internal reliability. His alpha for the LFS over two testing periods was .869 and .867 (n=481 and n=463) (Black 2008, 59).

Table 3. LFS reliability statistic (n=191)

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Lasting Faith Scale	.894	30

Sample Distribution

Initially, the data distribution from this research was negatively skewed. Four students scored significantly lower than the rest, which kept this sample from exhibiting a normal distribution. The skewness numbers for the student sample are shown in Table 4. Figure 11 shows the negatively skewed distribution.

Table 4. Initial student sample skewness

	N	Skewness	SE	SK/SE
LFS	191	-1.27	0.18	-7.22
Discipleship and spiritual depth	191	-1.59	0.18	-9.01
Family influence	191	-0.87	0.18	-4.97
Mentoring and intergenerational influences	191	-1.81	0.18	-10.28
Peer influences	191	-1.15	0.18	-6.53

To correct the problem, lower limits were set for each of the scales. Scores for the four youth who scored lower than 100 on the overall LFS were set to 100. Lower limits for the subscales were set at 25 for discipleship and spiritual depth, mentoring and intergenerational influences, and peer influences. The lower limit for family influence was set at 20. Because so many students scored in the higher ranges on each of the scales, the finer differentiations at the lower end were less important. Below a certain

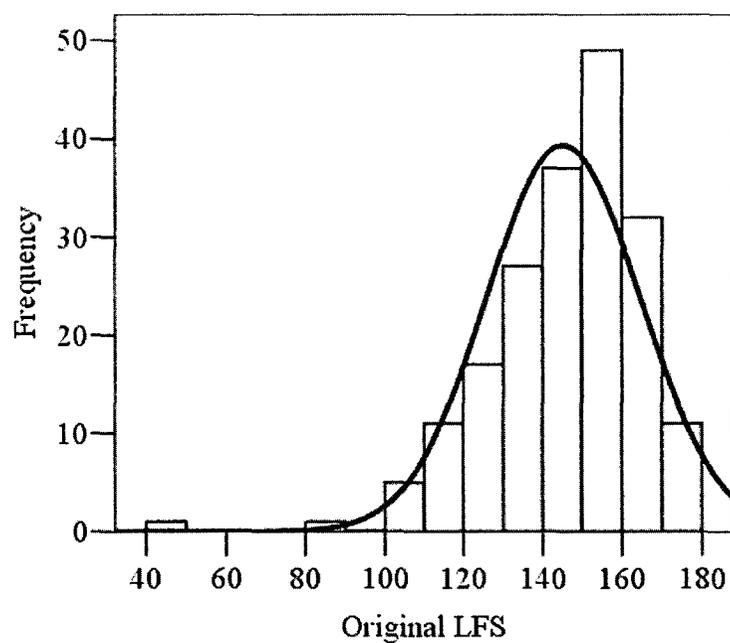


Figure 11. Negatively skewed LFS distribution

point, it is sufficient to know that a person received the lowest score. Table 5 reflects a normal sample distribution after the distributions have been corrected as described.

Values of SK/SE are all within an acceptable range.

Table 5. Corrected student LFS distribution

	N	Skewness	SE	SK/SE
LFS	191	-0.58	0.18	-3.30
Discipleship and spiritual depth	191	-0.71	0.18	-4.05
Family influence	191	-0.48	0.18	-2.71
Mentoring and intergenerational influences	191	-0.37	0.18	-2.08
Peer influences	191	-0.78	0.18	-4.43

Figure 12 shows the overall LFS distribution after the correction. Figures 13-16 show the distribution of each individual subscale.

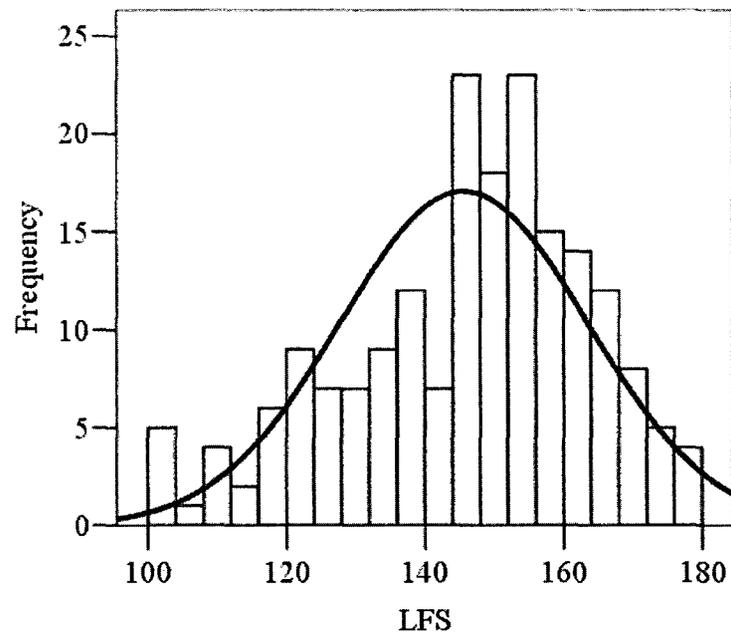


Figure 12. Overall LFS distribution after correction

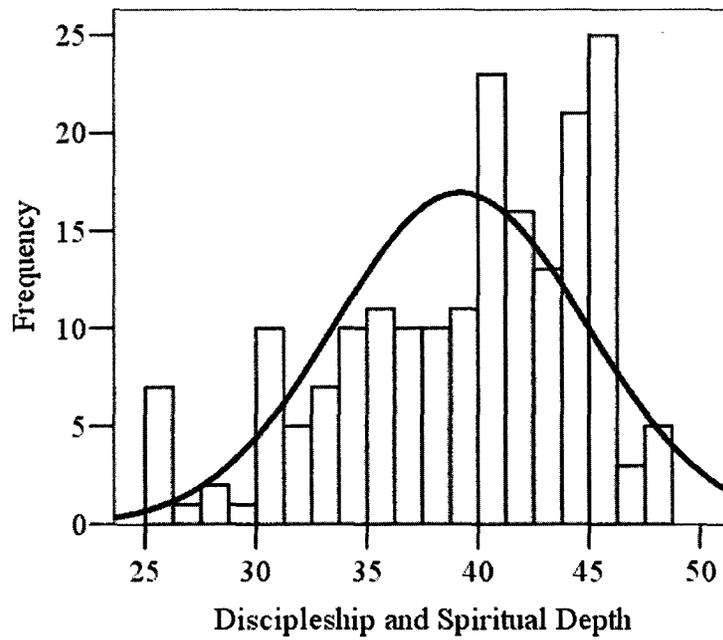


Figure 13. Discipleship and spiritual depth subscale distribution after correction

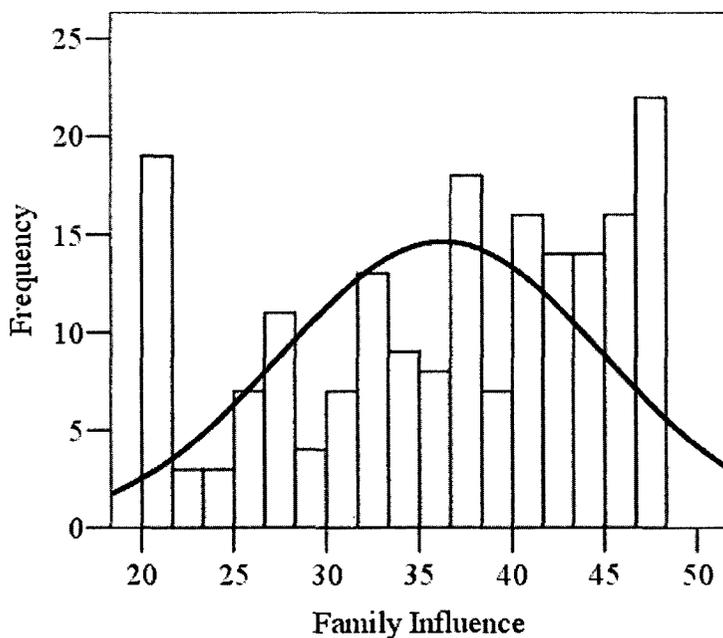


Figure 14. Family influence subscale distribution after correction

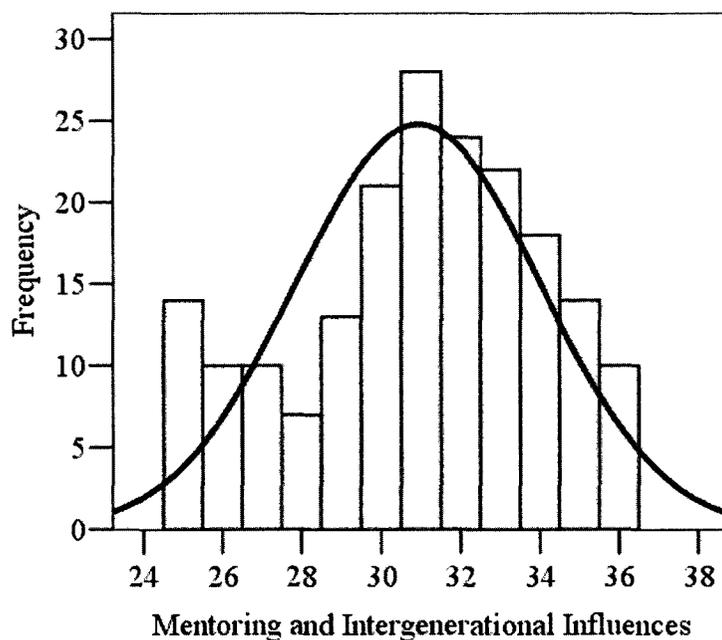


Figure 15. Mentoring and intergenerational influence subscale distribution after correction

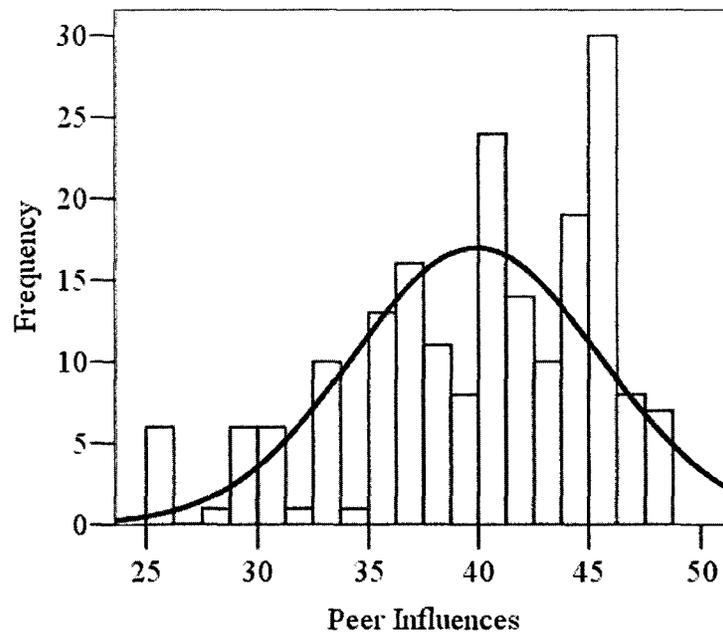


Figure 16. Peer influences subscale distribution after correction

LFS Relationships to the Four Domains of Influence

Research questions 1-4 deal with the relationship of Black's four domains of influence (discipleship and spiritual depth, family influences, mentoring and intergenerational influences, and peer relationships) to the total LFS score. As illustrated in Table 6, the relationship of the subscales to each other was tested using Pearson correlations on these subscales utilizing all student LFS results.

The subscales (domains of influence) are not independent of each other, as evidenced by the significant correlations among them. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is considerable overlap among the domains of influence that Black used to define lasting faith. All four of the subscales (domains) demonstrate a positive relationship with the scores of the other subscales.

Table 6. Pearson correlations between the LFS subscales (n = 191)

	Family influence	Mentoring and intergenerational influences	Peer influences
Discipleship and spiritual depth	.194 **	.470 ***	.662 ***
Family influence		.250 ***	.306 ***
Mentoring and intergenerational influences			.541 ***

** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Another test was run on the data to determine the relationship of the subscales with the overall LFS score. Table 7 shows the Pearson correlations between the LFS subscales and corrected total LFS. The r^2 value in the table is the corrected total LFS squared and provides the variance explained. It is nearly sufficient to say that at $p < .01$ for this test, all subscales are strong with respect to the significance of the relationships to the total LFS score. Research questions 1-4 will be addressed briefly with these results.

Table 7. Pearson correlations between LFS subscales and corrected total LFS (n=191)

	<i>Corrected Total LFS</i>	r^2
Discipleship and spiritual depth	0.499 ***	.249
Family influences	0.289 ***	.084
Mentoring and intergenerational influences	0.507 ***	.257
Peer influences	0.626 ***	.392

*** $p < .001$

Research Question 1 – Discipleship and Spiritual Depth

This section reports the results of research question 1: What is the relationship of the lasting faith tendency of the youth respondents to their experience of discipleship and spiritual depth? Table 8 shows the items corresponding with this subscale and the mean score and standard deviation for each item (n=191). The items of this subscale relate to students' personal faith commitment and their choices regarding spiritual practices.

Table 8. Discipleship and spiritual depth items

Question (n=191)	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>
1. I often have the opportunity to use my skills and talents to help out in my church or youth group.	4.96	1.015
2. Most of my decisions are based on what I believe God wants me to do with my life.	4.48	1.173
3. I enjoy reading the Bible outside of church.	4.31	1.238
4. I don't think about God much outside of church or youth group.	5.08	1.275
5. If it were completely up to me and my parents did not care, I would attend church or youth group activities LESS often than I do now.	5.38	1.216
6. The people at my church DO NOT allow me to think for myself.	5.42	1.092
7. I often talk to a Christian friend about my faith.	4.41	1.307
8. The sermons in our church and/or youth group mean a lot to me.	4.93	1.133

The corrected total LFS for discipleship and spiritual depth (0.499) is the total LFS scale excluding all the items related to this subscale. The r^2 value (.249) indicates that this subscale explains 24.9% of the variance in the LFS score (Table 7). The correlation of this subscale to the overall LFS score is strong.

Research Question 2 – Family Influences

This section reports the results of research question 2: What is the relationship of the lasting faith tendency of the youth respondents to their family influence? Table 9 shows the items corresponding with this subscale and the mean score and standard deviation for each item (n=191). These items relate to how students view the spiritual lives of their parents and the influence students' families have on their own spiritual lives.

Table 9. Family influence items

Question (n=191)	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>
9. My MOTHER attends church two or more times a month.	5.21	1.625
10. I would describe the spiritual life of my MOTHER as a sincere Christian faith.	5.01	1.414
11. People consider my MOTHER as an active leader in our church.	4.05	1.758
12. My FATHER attends church two or more times a month.	4.63	2.006
13. I would describe the spiritual life of my FATHER as a sincere Christian faith.	4.60	1.689
14. People consider my FATHER as an active leader in our church.	3.70	2.006
15. In my home, we often have discussions, involving me and either or both of my parents, about our faith.	3.85	1.447
16. My parents spend time helping me know how to make right decisions.	4.66	1.144

The corrected total LFS for family influences is 0.289. The r^2 value (.084) shows that this subscale explains 8.4% of the variance in the LFS score. This is the lowest r^2 value in Table 7, but is still a strong correlation with respect to the significance of its relationship to the overall score.

Research Question 3 – Mentoring and Intergenerational Influences

This is a brief report of research question 3: What is the relationship of the lasting faith tendency of the youth respondents to their mentoring and intergenerational influences? Table 10 shows the items corresponding with this subscale and the mean score and standard deviation for each item (n=191). These subscale items focus on the relationships students have with adults other than their parents and how those relationships affect the students' spiritual lives.

Table 10. Mentoring and intergenerational influences items

Question (n=191)	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>
17. When I think of adults (whether Christian or non-Christian) whom I respect and look up to (teacher, coach, employer, neighbor, etc.), in general I would describe their spiritual life as a sincere Christian faith.	4.67	1.057
18. I know two or more adult Christians (other than my parents) who know my name.	5.83	0.595
19. Adults in our church are spiritually mature.	5.21	0.883
20. Most of my adult relatives (other than my parents) encourage my Christian beliefs.	4.66	1.408
21. I look up to the leadership of our main youth leader.	5.55	0.874
22. I often pay attention to the advice I get from adults other than my parents.	4.81	1.094

The corrected total LFS for mentoring and intergenerational influences is 0.507. The r^2 value (.257) indicates that this subscale accounts for 25.7% of the variance in the LFS score (Table 7). Again, a strong correlation with the overall score is apparent.

Research Question 4 – Peer Influences

This section focuses on research question 4: What is the relationship of the lasting faith tendency of the youth respondents to their peer influences? Table 11 shows

the items corresponding with this subscale and the mean score and standard deviation for each item (n=191). The items listed here are focused mainly on students' relationships with their peers and how those relationships influence the students' spiritual lives.

Table 11. Peer influences items

Question (n=191)	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>
23. I enjoy spending time with my church friends outside of church activities.	5.52	0.905
24. I believe it's important to choose friends who are Christians.	5.09	1.127
25. Most of the friends of my family DO NOT go to church.	4.52	1.293
26. My closest friend(s) attend(s) church or youth group two times a month or more.	5.11	1.335
27. In general, most of my closest friends have a sincere Christian faith.	4.80	1.319
28. I do not have any real friends at church.	5.35	1.173
29. Church leaders are too concerned with church programs and NOT concerned with people.	5.05	1.224
30. My friends tend to follow my suggestions about things to do together.	4.34	1.135

Table 7 shows the corrected total LFS for peer influences is 0.626. The r^2 value (.392) demonstrates that this subscale explains 39.2% of the variance in the LFS score. This is the subscale with the strongest correlation to the overall score.

Research Questions 1-4 Summary

The key insight learned from this analysis related to research questions 1-4 is that the four subscales (Black's domains of influence) are very intertwined. They are closely related to each other and to the overall LFS score. These subscales seem to go together for the students responding. Each of these areas in students' lives has some effect on the other three areas. Some of the subscales have a stronger correlation than others, but they are all strongly correlated.

Research Question 5 – Comparison of Youth Ministers and Youth

Twelve churches were used for matched analysis between youth ministers and youth. As explained in the sample description earlier in this chapter, 12 churches had five or more students complete the LFS survey. This data was used to address research question 5: How do the Lasting Faith Scale (LFS) scores of the youth respondents compare with how their youth ministers believe their groups will score on the LFS? The chief concern of this research was to see how accurately youth ministers assessed the lasting faith tendency of the students in their churches.

Table 12 shows the paired samples correlations between youth ministers and students. None of the scales is significantly correlated between the two samples. How the youth ministers thought their students would respond was not significantly related to how the students actually responded on average. Youth ministers underscored their students on every subscale and, consequently, on the total LFS score. The mean LFS score for students was 146.24 with a standard deviation of 7.05 and the mean LFS score from the youth pastors was 134.25 with a standard deviation of 12.69.

The paired sample t-tests (Table 13) show that, for the overall LFS score and for the mentoring and intergenerational influences subscale and the relationships influences subscale, students scored significantly higher than their youth ministers thought they would. The significance level (shown by the p-value) was 0.019, 0.007, and 0.027 for those scores respectively. Any p-value less than .05 is considered a significant difference.

Table 12. Paired samples correlations

	<i>N</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p-value</i>
LFS	12	-0.114	0.724
Discipleship and spiritual depth	12	-0.184	0.566
Family influences	12	0.571	0.052
Mentoring and intergenerational influences	12	-0.285	0.369
Peer influences	12	-0.232	0.468

Table 13. Paired samples t-tests

	Students			Youth Ministers		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p-value</i>
	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>			
LFS	12	146.24	7.05	134.25	12.69	-2.73	11	0.019
Discipleship and spiritual depth	12	39.66	2.25	36.79	7.06	-1.28	11	0.229
Family influence	12	34.84	3.77	33.21	4.92	-1.36	11	0.201
Mentoring and intergenerational influences	12	31.09	0.90	27.54	3.31	-3.34	11	0.007
Peer influences	12	40.66	2.11	36.71	4.45	-2.56	11	0.027

Since a small number of churches (12) were utilized for this comparison, another test was made using all students completing the LFS (n=191) and all youth pastors completing the LFS (n=81). The mean LFS score for the youth was 145.60 with a standard deviation of 17.87. The mean LFS score for the youth ministers was 130.79 with a standard deviation of 17.28 (see Table 14). The subscales were compared in this test as well. The mean score for students on the mentoring and intergenerational subscale

was 39.21 (SD=5.62). The youth ministers had a mean score of 34.72 on the same subscale (SD=6.88). On the family influence subscale, the students' mean score was 36.25 (SD=8.68). The youth ministers' mean score for this subscale was 33.19 (SD=7.25). On the mentoring and intergenerational influences subscale, the students' mean score was 30.93 (SD=3.08) and the youth ministers' mean score was 27.78 (SD=2.87). The students had a mean score of 39.89 (SD=5.61) on the peer influences subscale and the youth ministers' score was 35.90 (SD=4.87). As illustrated by the p-values in Table 14, the independent samples t-tests strongly support the findings of the paired t-tests above. In fact, when testing the entire samples against one another, the students scored significantly higher on the overall LFS score and for each of the subscales than their youth ministers thought they would.

Table 14. Independent samples t-tests

	Students			Youth Ministers			<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> -value
	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>			
LFS	191	145.60	17.87	81	130.79	17.28	6.31	270	< .001
Discipleship and spiritual depth	191	39.21	5.62	81	34.72	6.88	5.64	270	< .001
Family influences	191	36.25	8.68	81	33.19	7.25	2.79	270	0.006
Mentoring and intergenerational influences	191	30.93	3.08	81	27.78	2.87	7.88	270	< .001
Peer influences	191	39.89	5.61	81	35.90	4.87	5.57	270	< .001

The youth ministers' conception of the lasting faith tendency of the participating youth for this research was not accurate. On the overall LFS scores and for each subscale, the youth pastors believed their students would score lower than they actually did as indicated by the way they scored their students. The difference in scoring was significant with the matched analysis with the 12 churches that had at least five students complete the LFS and even more so with independent samples t-test where all student responses were compared with all youth minister responses.

Demographic Significance

There were seven demographic questions in the LFS. All seven were measured for significance to the LFS outcomes. The purpose was to ascertain if those demographic variables had any affect on the students' LFS scores. Significance was sought at the .05 level. Two of the demographic items were found to be non-significant, while the other five were significant. This study concluded that the non-significant and significant demographics are the same as those found by Black when he tested the LFS (Black, 2008, 59-62).

Non-significant Demographics

The gender and age of responding students were non-significant demographic items in this research. That means that the age or gender of the students did not have a meaningful effect on the outcomes of their LFS scores. Table 15 shows the division of students between males (n=67) and females (n=124), their mean score for the overall LFS and each subscale, the standard deviation, and for comparing the gender differences, the t-value, degrees of freedom, and the p-value. The p-value was not close to being significant (< .05) for any of the scores.

Table 15. T-tests by student gender

	Male			Female			<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>			
LFS	67	146.10	16.61	124	145.32	18.57	0.29	189	0.774
Discipleship and spiritual depth	67	38.63	5.62	124	39.53	5.62	-1.06	189	0.289
Family influence	67	37.54	7.55	124	35.56	9.19	1.51	189	0.133
Mentoring and intergenerational influence	67	30.64	3.11	124	31.08	3.06	-0.94	189	0.348
Peer influences	67	39.66	5.18	124	40.02	5.84	-0.42	189	0.674

Age divisions of the student sample were shown earlier in this chapter in Figure 4 and, as with gender, students' age was not a significant factor in this research. Table 16 shows a Pearson correlation for the ages with the total LFS score and each subscale. Only the *r*- and *p*-values are shown to demonstrate that no significance in age differences with regard to LFS scores was found.

Table 16. Pearson correlation with student age

	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
LFS	-0.060	0.411
Discipleship and spiritual depth	0.107	0.140
Family influence	-0.119	0.101
Mentoring and intergenerational influences	-0.084	0.248
Peer influences	-0.045	0.540

Significant Demographics

All five of the other demographic questions proved to be significant to the LFS outcomes. One-way ANOVA at the .05 level was used to test the significance of each of these demographic items. Then a post hoc pairwise comparison with a Bonferroni adjustment was made on each demographic. This is an adjustment to the significance

level to make it harder to attain. This demonstrates which groupings within the demographic item (i.e. parents married, parents divorced, other) are actually different from one another.

The first significant demographic asked students, “What is the status of your birth parents?” The results of this ANOVA are shown in Table 17. Parents’ marital status was significant in the overall LFS score ($p=0.023$) and the family influence subscale ($p<.001$). The post hoc test is shown in Table 18. The p -values demonstrate that the LFS scores and the family influence subscale scores of students whose parents are married are significantly higher than those whose parents are not.

Table 17. ANOVA by parents’ marital status

		<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
LFS	married	133	147.70	16.97	3.84	0.023
	divorced	33	138.36	19.17		
	other	25	143.96	18.82		
Discipleship and spiritual depth	married	133	38.92	5.63	1.35	0.263
	divorced	33	39.12	6.31		
	other	25	40.92	4.35		
Family influence	married	133	38.42	7.54	16.88	< .001
	divorced	33	30.03	7.44		
	other	25	32.92	10.94		
Mentoring and intergenerational influences	married	133	31.01	3.02	0.48	0.619
	divorced	33	30.45	3.73		
	other	25	31.12	2.37		
Peer influences	married	133	39.83	5.64	0.07	0.933
	divorced	33	39.82	6.65		
	other	25	40.28	3.87		

Table 18. Post hoc pairwise comparison – parents’ marital status

<i>DV</i>	<i>(I) parmarital</i>	<i>(J) parmarital</i>	<i>Mean Difference (I-J)</i>	<i>p</i>
LFS	married	divorced	9.34	0.021
Family influence	married	divorced	8.39	< .001
		other	5.50	0.006

The next significant demographic item was, “Whom do you live with most of the time?” Table 19 shows the significance of this item. Parent(s) with whom students live was significant in the overall LFS score ($p=0.010$) and the family influence subscale ($p< .001$). The post hoc test is shown in Table 20. Seven students who reported living with others were excluded from the analysis (too few to represent this option in the ANOVA). The one-parent group represents mostly single mothers (there was one single father). The parent-stepparent group was mostly mothers and stepfathers (there were four fathers with stepmothers). There is a significant difference in scores (total LFS and family influence subscale) between students who live with both of their parents and those who do not.

Table 19. ANOVA by parent with whom student lives

		<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
LFS	both	143	148.03	16.99	4.70	0.010
	one parent	15	142.07	14.42		
	parent & stepparent	26	137.35	19.46		
Discipleship and spiritual depth	both	143	39.13	5.56	0.48	0.622
	one parent	15	40.60	5.03		
	parent & stepparent	26	39.04	6.54		
Family influence	both	143	38.52	7.64	21.61	< .001
	one parent	15	29.53	5.67		
	parent & stepparent	26	29.58	8.93		
Mentoring and intergenerational influences	both	143	30.92	3.01	0.08	0.926
	one parent	15	31.20	3.17		
	parent & stepparent	26	30.81	3.54		
Peer influences	both	143	39.92	5.48	1.38	0.254
	one parent	15	41.93	4.65		
	parent & stepparent	26	38.96	6.26		

Table 20. Post hoc pairwise comparison – parent with whom student lives

<i>DV</i>	<i>(I) livewith2</i>	<i>(J) livewith2</i>	<i>Mean Difference (I-J)</i>	<i>p</i>
LFS	both	parent & stepparent	10.69	0.012
Family influence	both	one parent	8.99	< .001
		parent & stepparent	8.95	< .001

Another significant demographic item was, “Which parent do you most closely identify with?” The ANOVA (Table 21) for this item was significant for the overall LFS score ($p < .001$), family influences score ($p < .001$), mentoring and intergenerational influences score ($p=0.030$), and peer influences scores ($p=0.013$). The post hoc pairwise comparison (Table 22) shows that students who identify with both parents score significantly higher than those who identify with only one or neither parent. The group who identifies with neither parent scores significantly lower than those students who identify with only one of their parents. The significance in scoring differences shows in the overall LFS score and in every subscale score.

The demographic item, “Which parent do you most respect related to spiritual matters?” was also significant in terms of students’ lasting faith tendency. The ANOVA (Table 23) for this item was significant for the overall LFS score ($p < .001$), family influences score ($p < .001$), mentoring and intergenerational influences score ($p=0.030$), and peer influences scores ($p=0.007$). Table 24 demonstrates that the post hoc pairwise comparison shows that the groups who indicate spiritual respect for both parents, mother, or neither score significantly different on all scales except for discipleship and spiritual depth from students who were in other groupings. Those who indicated respect in spiritual matters for both parents scored significantly higher than those who chose any other answer. Those who chose “neither” scored significantly lower

Table 21. ANOVA by parent with whom student most identifies

		<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
LFS	both	77	151.06	15.02	10.52	< .001
	mother	66	141.97	17.94		
	father	35	147.97	17.48		
	neither	13	125.23	16.95		
Discipleship and spiritual depth	both	77	39.61	5.22	2.51	0.061
	mother	66	39.48	5.89		
	father	35	39.34	5.09		
	neither	13	35.15	6.85		
Family influences	both	77	39.66	6.63	12.28	< .001
	mother	66	33.24	9.25		
	father	35	37.37	8.12		
	neither	13	28.31	8.24		
Mentoring and intergenerational influences	both	77	31.45	3.05	3.04	0.030
	mother	66	30.82	3.16		
	father	35	30.77	2.87		
	neither	13	28.77	2.52		
Peer influences	both	77	40.40	5.18	3.68	0.013
	mother	66	39.82	5.69		
	father	35	40.66	5.38		
	neither	13	35.15	6.58		

Table 22. Post hoc pairwise comparison – parent with whom student most identifies

<i>DV</i>	<i>(I) idwith</i>	<i>(J) idwith</i>	<i>Mean Difference (I-J)</i>	<i>p</i>
LFS	both	mother	9.10	0.008
		neither	-25.83	< .001
	neither	mother	-16.74	0.007
		father	-22.74	< .001
Discipleship and spiritual depth	both	neither	4.46	0.049
Family influences	both	mother	6.42	< .001
		neither	11.36	< .001
	neither	both	-11.36	< .001
		father	-9.06	0.004
Mentoring and intergenerational influences	both	neither	2.69	0.021
	neither	both	-2.69	0.021
Peer influences	neither	both	-5.25	0.010
		mother	-4.66	0.034
		father	-5.50	0.014

on the indicated scales. Students who indicated that their father was the parent they respected most in spiritual matters did not have significantly higher scores than any of the other groupings.

Table 23. ANOVA by parent student respects most in spiritual matters

		N	Mean	SD	F	p
LFS	both	90	152.60	14.87	20.18	< .001
	mother	46	140.54	17.08		
	father	28	148.93	14.89		
	neither	27	127.41	16.43		
Discipleship and spiritual depth	both	90	39.87	5.17	2.26	0.083
	mother	46	39.35	6.14		
	father	28	39.32	4.71		
	neither	27	36.70	6.56		
Family influences	both	90	40.59	6.70	32.43	< .001
	mother	46	32.24	7.28		
	father	28	37.96	8.02		
	neither	27	26.85	7.09		
Mentoring and intergenerational influences	both	90	31.36	2.85	3.05	0.030
	mother	46	30.76	3.39		
	father	28	31.29	2.87		
	neither	27	29.41	3.12		
Peer influences	both	90	40.98	5.19	4.20	0.007
	mother	46	39.00	5.61		
	father	28	40.61	4.60		
	neither	27	37.04	6.85		

The final demographic that showed significance was the item, “When I think about Jesus Christ, I identify with him primarily as:” Two students who reported no meaningful relationship were excluded from the analysis. There were too few to represent this grouping in the ANOVA (Table 25). This item was significant for the overall LFS score ($p < .001$), the discipleship and spiritual depth score ($p=0.010$), the family influences score ($p=0.003$), and the peer influences score ($p=0.002$). The differences in the mentoring and intergenerational influences score were not significant

Table 24. Post hoc pairwise comparison – parent student respects most in spiritual matters

<i>DV</i>	<i>(I) respect</i>	<i>(J) respect</i>	<i>Mean Difference (I-J)</i>	<i>p</i>
LFS	both	mother	12.06	< .001
	mother	both	-12.06	< .001
	neither	both	-25.19	< .001
		mother	-13.14	0.004
		father	-21.52	< .001
Family influences	mother	both	-8.35	< .001
		father	-5.73	0.006
	neither	both	-13.74	< .001
		mother	-5.39	0.012
		father	-11.11	< .001
Mentoring and intergenerational influences	both	neither	1.95	0.023
Peer influences	both	neither	3.94	0.007

($p=0.086$). For the post hoc pairwise comparison (Table 26), only two groupings (those who identify with Jesus Christ as personal Savior and those who identify with him as Son of God) were used because the other two groupings were too small to be significant. Those who identify with Jesus Christ as personal Savior scored significantly higher on the overall LFS and all of the subscales except mentoring and intergenerational influences than those students who identify with Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

The significant demographics demonstrate that these items are very important in the measurement of lasting faith tendency with the youth respondents. Their grouping in the areas of parents' marital status, parent with whom they live, parent with whom they most identify, parent they most respect in spiritual matters, and how they identify with Jesus Christ has significant impact on their LFS score.

Table 25. ANOVA by how student identifies with Jesus Christ

		<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
LFS	example	18	142.78	20.20	9.516	< .001
	Son	28	134.18	17.70		
	Savior	143	148.83	15.88		
Discipleship and spiritual depth	example	18	38.67	6.22	4.744	0.010
	Son	28	36.64	6.20		
	Savior	143	39.99	5.05		
Family influences	example	18	33.67	9.36	6.151	0.003
	Son	28	31.79	8.18		
	Savior	143	37.45	8.42		
Mentoring and intergenerational influences	example	18	31.28	3.39	2.489	0.086
	Son	28	29.82	3.14		
	Savior	143	31.18	2.93		
Peer influences	example	18	39.22	5.88	6.287	0.002
	Son	28	36.96	5.87		
	Savior	143	40.76	5.08		

Table 26. Post hoc pairwise comparison – how student identifies with Jesus Christ

<i>DV</i>	<i>(I) relJesus2</i>	<i>(J) relJesus2</i>	<i>Mean Difference (I-J)</i>	<i>p</i>
LFS	Son	Savior	-14.65	< .001
Discipleship and spiritual depth	Son	Savior	-3.34	0.009
Family influences	Son	Savior	-5.66	0.004
Peer influences	Son	Savior	-3.79	0.002

Evaluation of the Research Design

The purpose of this research was to use Wesley Black's Lasting Faith Scale (LFS) to compare the lasting faith tendency of youth (reflected by their LFS scores) with what their youth ministers believed would be their groups' LFS scores. The design for this study was quantitative in nature and utilized an online survey to collect data for statistical analysis related to the purpose and research questions. This survey was administered to full time youth ministers in Kentucky Baptist Convention (KBC) and

South Carolina Baptist Convention (SCBC) churches and then to students participating in the youth ministries of those same churches. This evaluation of the research design will address the strengths and weaknesses of this study, as well as make recommendations for the replication of this research.

Sample Sizes

Leedy and Ormrod stated, “The larger the sample, the better” (Leedy and Ormrod 2001, 221). The intention of this researcher was to elicit the participation of half of the full-time youth pastors in KBC and SCBC churches. That would have yielded more than 200 youth minister surveys and the same number of churches from which to draw for the second sample – students in those churches. The researcher also wanted to have between 1,000 and 2,000 completed youth surveys for analysis.

The sample sizes for this research were 81 youth ministers and 191 youth. Repeated attempts were made by each state convention office to solicit youth pastor participation. Understandably, these offices have a policy of guarding the privacy of these youth pastors and their contact information. All correspondence to elicit initial participation had to come from the state conventions. Besides the e-mails sent, youth pastors were talked to personally and contacted by phone. Promotion of this research project also was made in meetings attended by these youth ministers. Every reasonable attempt was made to garner the desired participation. Leedy and Ormrod write, “the size of an adequate sample depends on how homogeneous or heterogeneous the population is – how alike or different its members are with respect to the characteristics of research interest” (Leedy and Ormrod 2001, 221). The first population for this study would be seen as a homogeneous group since they are all full time SBC youth pastors from Kentucky and South Carolina. It is more difficult to make a similar claim about the

youth in those churches as their characteristics would be much more diverse. The difficulty in obtaining student responses revolved around the willingness of the youth ministers to encourage their participation. The researcher had no direct contact with the youth for this research and could not personally affect the number of responses, other than to keep trying to solicit youth pastors' participation and youth participation via those youth pastors.

When youth pastors did participate in the LFS survey, most of them voluntarily provided their e-mail addresses. The researcher, to remind youth pastors to solicit student participation, used these e-mail addresses. Youth ministers were reminded on several occasions that those with at least 15 students participating would be entered in a drawing to receive an iPod or iPhone 3G.

Because of very low initial response numbers, the survey period was extended from July through November 2008. A new survey site (www.surveymonkey.com) was also utilized to simplify the process. In the beginning of this research, youth ministers were directed to a survey site online where they would register for the LFS. They would be sent codes (one for themselves and one for their students) to enter the LFS site. Youth pastors were required to have the informed consent forms filled out on paper for each of their participating students and then mail those forms to the researcher. No responses were generated by this method. On the new survey site, the informed consent form was incorporated into the survey online. Toward the end of that period, no more surveys were being completed, so it was closed to begin analysis of the available data. This researcher would have liked to see much higher sample numbers. It became evident in this process that there is difficulty in getting youth minister participation. Student participation was most likely dependent on the interest of youth ministers in the outcome of the research.

The state convention offices at the KBC and the SCBC expressed keen interest in this study and did their part in encouraging the participation of their youth pastors.

Another weakness of this research design regards the informed consent form. Since almost half (45.7%) of students who began the survey dropped out at this point, the assumption is made that they did not want to or could not complete this aspect of the process. The researcher was informed by two youth pastors that this kept them from being able to garner any student participation. One said that a few parents informed him that they were uncomfortable with a survey that required their permission. Another youth pastor reported that his church's lawyer advised them not to administer the LFS to their youth because of the informed consent requirement. While necessary because of the target sample of middle and high school students, options should be explored that would make this step less daunting.

Survey Analysis

The LFS was a reliable and easy to use instrument for this research. The online survey was simple to access and understand and was designed to take only ten or fifteen minutes to complete.

All throughout the survey period, the survey responses were monitored on the survey site (www.surveymonkey.com). Once the survey was closed to further participation, the data was downloaded to an Excel spreadsheet. The data was left in its raw form on the first sheet but broken down into youth ministers, youth, paired groupings with youth and youth pastors from the same churches, scorings, etc. on subsequent sheets for initial analysis. This file was sent electronically to a statistician recruited to assist with the analysis for this study. Surveymonkey.com was a very user-friendly site. Survey setup and launching of the instrument for participant access were simple

processes. A link to the LFS survey was sent to the youth ministers who provided it to their students. All items necessary, including the informed consent form, were a part of the electronic LFS.

Evaluation of the data caused the researcher to reconsider research questions 1-4. These questions dealt with Black's four domains of influence that helped shape the creation of the LFS. Since the findings show that all four domains are interrelated and seem to come as a "package," there may have been more significance, in hindsight, of exploring the relationships of the five significant demographic items on the overall LFS outcome and on the domains of influence. Black discovered in the testing phase of the LFS that these are significant demographics (Black 2008, 60-62).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

In this final chapter, the extent to which the findings of this study can be used to enhance ministry to youth is discussed. Evaluation is made about the effect of each of the four domains of influence to the lasting faith tendency of young people and the implications of that effect for ministry practice. Assessment is also made concerning the accuracy of the youth ministers' expectations of their students' lasting faith tendency. Evaluation of the impact of significant demographic items is also made. The applications of this research on the practice of youth ministry are explored. The limitations of this research are considered and, finally, suggestions for further research in this area are presented.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this research was to use Wesley Black's Lasting Faith Scale (LFS) to compare the lasting faith tendency of youth (reflected by their LFS scores) with what their youth ministers believed would be their groups' LFS scores. LFS responses were evaluated for the effects on scores of the four domains of influence – discipleship and spiritual depth; family; mentoring and intergenerational influences; and peer relationships.

The following questions were used to guide the gathering and analysis of data for this study:

1. What is the relationship of the lasting faith tendency of the youth respondents to their experience of discipleship and spiritual depth?
2. What is the relationship of the lasting faith tendency of the youth respondents to their family influence?
3. What is the relationship of the lasting faith tendency of the youth respondents to their mentoring and intergenerational influences?
4. What is the relationship of the lasting faith tendency of the youth respondents to their peer influences?
5. How do the Lasting Faith Scale (LFS) scores of the youth respondents compare with how their youth ministers believe their groups will score on the LFS?

This section will be comprised of objective analysis and subjective interpretation of findings related to these research questions. Conclusions will be drawn from the research based the research question and the significant demographic items.

Conclusions from Research Questions 1-4 Findings

The first four research questions dealt with the four subscales (domains of influence) of the LFS (discipleship and spiritual depth; family influences; mentoring and intergenerational influences; peer influences) and their relationship to the lasting faith tendency of students, reflected by their LFS scores. The relationship of each one of these domains of influence to the other domains is strongly significant. This is also true of the relationship of each domain of influence to the overall LFS score. The data related to these questions is represented in Tables 6 to 11 in chapter 4.

The strongest relationship to the overall LFS score was the peer influences subscale ($r^2=.392$) and the weakest (though still strongly correlated) was the family influence subscale ($r^2=.084$). The discipleship and spiritual depth subscale and the mentoring and intergenerational influences subscale had similar relationships ($r^2=.249$ and $r^2=.257$ respectively) with the total LFS score. As differences in the relationships of the subscales with the LFS score is discussed, it is important to remember that all of these

subscales are strongly correlated with the total LFS score. The analysis of the peer influences domain indicates that it has more influence on these students' propensity to stay connected to a local church after high school (lasting faith tendency) than any other domain of influence. According to the data, the scores for this subscale influenced the total LFS score by a significantly higher amount than family influences did. This seems to indicate that students' peer relationships hold more sway over their spiritual commitment and lasting faith tendency than any of the other domains of influence.

The findings of this data fit what has been observed and tested regarding adolescents and peer influence for a number of years. According to Youniss and Smollar, socialization theory espouses popular views about peer influence among adolescents and holds that they learn attitudes and behaviors from interactions with other young people (Youniss and Smollar 1985, 133). According to Jean Schwind, "By segregating adolescents from adults for a large part of the day and creating an environment where teenagers interact outside parental control, the modern high school has increased generational distance and difference" (Schwind 2008, 1014). As was discussed in the literature review, time at church has become a segregated time for families (DeVries 2004a, 21). Between time at school, time at church, and extra-curricular activities, families have less and less time to influence their young people while friends have more and more. This family segregation is certainly a phenomenon common to growing up, but modern day youth ministry seems to exacerbate the situation even more. It is not difficult to see that peer influence will affect every area of youths' lives. This study underscores the strength of that influence in the area of lasting faith.

In the realm of spiritual influence, the precedent literature review showed strong evidence for the role of young peoples' peers in their spiritual commitment and church involvement. Researchers studying the spiritual influences in the lives of

adolescents recognized the strength of this factor (Lamport 1990, 25; Barna 2001, 134).

While Smith and Denton found parental influence to have the greatest impact on the spiritual lives of young people, it is important to recognize that their research was undertaken by surveying a much wider spectrum of young people, both religious and nonreligious (Smith and Denton 2005, 261). This current study focused on students involved in youth ministries where they would regularly have the opportunity to be strongly influenced by Christian peers. The church must be aware of the strength of this influence to understand how to channel it in the appropriate direction.

Even though the family influence subscale was the weakest of the four domains of influence in its relationship to the LFS, it was still strongly correlated to the other domains and to the lasting faith tendency of the student respondents. This should not lead the reader to diminish the influence of family on the spiritual lives of teenagers. The inference from this study is that other types of influence begin to take on a larger role in the spiritual lives of teenagers who are involved in Christian youth ministries. This is a natural transition, but family influence is still a highly critical force that can produce lasting results in young peoples' lives. In the precedent literature, several studies cited regarding the spiritual influences of adolescents recognized the crucial role parents play in this area (Dudley 1999, 118; Lamport 1990, 25; Schwadel and Smith, 2005; Strommen, Jones, and Rahn 2001, 54; LifeWay 2007). The NSYR research project led Smith and Denton to conclude, "the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents" (Smith and Denton 2005, 261). Since their influence is highly significant to the spiritual development of their children, the church must learn to work hand in hand with parents to optimize the time while they still have their young people in their homes.

As stated, the discipleship and spiritual depth domain and the mentoring and intergenerational influences domain are also vitally important with a very strong relationship to the development of lasting faith tendency in students. Discipleship and spiritual depth in this study is related mostly to spiritual activities that are self-directed, such as Bible reading, church attendance, spiritual discussions, choice of friends, etc. According to the findings of this study, when students are significantly involved in these pursuits, their tendency toward lasting faith is greater. Mentoring and intergenerational influences revolve around the relationships young people have with significant adults other than their parents. These could be youth pastors, teachers, coaches, youth sponsors, and many others. Like peer influence, this study shows that these associations have an even stronger relationship to these students' lasting faith tendency than their families. The impact of youth ministers or other adults who are concerned about teenagers' spiritual lives can be tremendous if those adults are encouraged and taught to maximize the potential of those relationships. This is especially encouraging when considering students who do not come from Christian homes (Lamport 1990, 27). The ability for them to develop lasting faith is still highly possible if the church will seize the opportunity.

In spite of the variance in strength of relationship with each other and total LFS scores, the four domains of influence come as a "package." This seems to indicate that these influences move up and down together. Each area appears to strengthen or weaken the others and has significant impact on the tendency of young people to stay involved in the local church after high school. Another way to state the importance of these subscales is that, in terms of spiritual influence, none of these domains of influence is insignificant in its relationship to the lasting faith tendency of young people. This is consistent with the findings of Wesley Black in his research with young adults and in his

development of the LFS (Black 2006, 2008). This data points to the idea that youth ministries cannot be at full capacity in ministering to young people if those who lead them do not understand these four domains of influence and utilize them to their full potential in shaping the spiritual lives of students.

Conclusions from Research Question 5 Findings

The purpose of this final research question was to determine how accurate youth ministers would be in predicting the LFS score of their students. (They were asked to complete the survey the way they believed their young people, in general, would respond.) Until the LFS has been more extensively utilized in formal research projects, it will be difficult to interpret the scores. It is impossible to say that a teenager who scores 130 on the LFS is a certain percentage more likely to stay connected to the local church than a student who scores 115. The only thing that can be assumed at this point is that the higher the LFS score, the higher the propensity of the young person to stay involved in the church after high school.

The youth pastors in the paired sample t-test (Table 13) scored significantly lower on the LFS than the students representing the same churches. This test only compared the youth ministers and youth from the 12 churches with at least five students completing the LFS. To further test this relationship, an independent samples t-test (Table 14) was conducted to compare all youth ministers who completed the LFS (n=81) with all youth respondents (n=191). This provided a better representation of the populations from which the two samples were taken. In the independent samples t-test, the youth ministers scored significantly less than the students on the overall LFS and on all of the subscales. The significance of this difference was even stronger when both of the complete samples were compared.

The students completing the LFS showed a stronger propensity to remain connected to the local church after high school than their youth pastors believed they would. This finding is actually the opposite result that was expected by this researcher. It was anticipated that youth ministers would overestimate the scores. This would have suggested that they might be overconfident about the lasting faith tendency of their youth and about the effectiveness of their ministries. Since this is not the case, possible reasons that might help explain this under-scoring will be considered. Without further research, the following suggestions are merely conjecture.

As mentioned in chapter 1 and discussed in chapter 2 of this paper, a number of studies have been conducted in recent years regarding the exodus of young people from the church at or near the end of high school (i.e., Barna 2003, 2006; Black 2006; LifeWay 2007; Lovelace 2006; Powell and Kubiak 2005). One possibility for the scoring differences is that the youth ministers have heard this type of information enough that it becomes their standard expectation of what happens to high school students as they approach graduation. If they have been in youth ministry for any length of time, they have probably seen this departure firsthand. They might have witnessed a number of young people “graduate” from the church about the same time they graduated from high school. When the outside information (published research) is coupled with personal observation, this expectation may have become cemented in their minds, lowering their expectations. This can be a discouraging dilemma and they might have found it less uncomfortable to accept this reality than to try to remain optimistic and be continually disappointed.

The lower youth ministers’ scores could also accompany the realization that their own youth ministry practices fall short of what they feel should be taking place in their churches. There are numerous studies and books written about youth ministry

models and practices (i.e., Dean 2004; DeVries 2004a; Duerksen 2001; Fields 1998; Strommen, Jones, and Rahn 2001; Yaconelli 2007). These authors focus on the shortfall of the typical American practice of youth ministry as it has developed in the age of professional youth ministry. The youth pastors in this study might have read the books and been to the conferences only to discover that they need to approach youth ministry differently or do more of what they are doing or have been doing it “wrong.” It might have been difficult to change the culture of their ministries and churches, so they became discouraged and developed low expectations for the students, in general, from their churches.

Another explanation for the disparity between youth minister scores and youth scores on the LFS is that these youth pastors really do not know their students as well as they think. The underestimation might be an accurate measure of the youth ministers’ perception of the lasting faith tendency of their young people. The data points to the possibility that this could be a plausible explanation for the variance. On the independent samples t-test (Table 14), the youth ministers’ under-scoring of students’ LFS scores was even more significant (and spread across all four subscales) than the differences displayed in the paired samples t-test (Table 13) comparing the youth pastors and youth from the 12 churches with at least five student LFS participants (completing the survey).

Another possibility is that these ministry leaders know their groups pretty well and, if a broader cross-section of their students had participated in the LFS, their predictions of the youth scores would have been more accurate. This option assumes that the most faithful students, in general, were the ones to participate in this research. These would probably be the students most likely to take the survey because their youth pastor asked them to. This possibility could be a plausible explanation as the expectation of participation of the more active and involved students might be a reasonable assumption.

If it is true that only the most active students, in general, respond, a larger sample might simply reinforce this same variance between youth pastor scores and youth scores. The same percentage of students from the population might be expected to participate and the sample would likely still be comprised of the most faithful young people from the participating youth groups. The only way to test this theory is to replicate the study in a way that ensures a broader cross section of students that is more representative of the overall population.

The real reason for this variance in what youth ministers believe to be the lasting faith tendency of their students and their students' LFS scores is impossible to ascertain from this study. The only way to begin discovering the reasons for the differences is to talk to the youth pastors involved. The potential for discovering the real reason for this variance will be suggested later in the section concerning further research.

Conclusions from Significant Demographics Findings

As discussed in chapter 4, the five significant demographic items in the LFS provide important insight into students' scores on the survey. Two of the demographic items (students' gender and students' age) were found to be non-significant. The others deal with young peoples' home life, identification with their parents, and identification with Jesus Christ. This is consistent with Black's findings in his analysis (Black 2008, 59-62). A one-way ANOVA was used to test the significance of these items at a .05 level. A post hoc pairwise comparison was then made with a Bonferroni adjustment. This second test demonstrates which groupings within the demographic item are actually different from each other. The conclusions from each of these items will be discussed separately. The data related to these demographics is represented in Tables 17 to 26 in chapter 4.

Parents' Marital Status

Students participating in this study whose parents are married scored significantly higher on the overall LFS than those whose parents are divorced (Table 18). The students whose parents are married scored higher on the family influence subscale than those whose parents are divorced or who chose "other." (The "other" category contained separated, widowed, never married, adopted, or unknown.) These findings are closely related to the findings of the second significant demographic. The conclusions based on these findings will be discussed together.

Students' Living Situation

Students living with both of their birth parents scored significantly higher on the LFS total score than students living with one parent and a stepparent. Those living with both parents score significantly higher on the family influence scale than those living with one parent alone or with one parent and a stepparent. Only seven students reported living with "other," so these were excluded from the analysis.

The conclusion from these first two demographic items is clear; students from intact homes with both of their birth parents have a higher lasting faith tendency than those who are not. This finding underscores the importance of the nuclear family in the spiritual development of young people and is also consistent with the findings from the Pearson correlations between LFS subscales and corrected total LFS scores (Table 7) as discussed when considering research questions 1-4. This domain of influence in young peoples' lives must be a constant consideration for all youth ministries and churches alike.

Parent With Whom Students Most Identify

Students who identify with mother and father equally score significantly higher on the total LFS and on all subscales than any other grouping. The other choices were “mother,” “father,” and “neither parent.” The students who did not identify with either parent scored significantly lower than every other grouping on all subscales and the overall LFS. There are two very clear extremes demonstrated in this demographic item. The term “identify” seems to indicate the parent to whom students are closest. Those who report having an equally close relationship with their mother and father have the highest propensity for staying connected to the local church as they move beyond their teenage years. Those students’ who are more alienated from their parents demonstrate fewer tendencies to remain in church. Again, these findings underscore the vital nature of youth ministries’ focus on the home life of their students and the importance of students having close relationships with both of their parents.

Parent Most Respected in Spiritual Matters

This resembles the preceding demographic but is much more focused on the spiritual aspects of the parent-child relationship. The choices for this item were “both parents equally,” “mother only,” “father only,” and “neither parent.” The students who indicated no respect for their parents in spiritual matters scored significantly lower on all possible scores (LFS and subscales). On the total LFS score and the mentoring and intergenerational influences subscale and the peer influences subscale, the students choosing “both parents equally” scored significantly higher than the other groupings. For the family influences subscale the students respecting mother only scored significantly higher than all other groupings. Nowhere in this test did students who chose “father only” score significantly higher than any of the other groupings.

Once again, in spiritual matters, both parents are crucial in establishing a lasting faith in their children. Mothers appear to have a little more influence in the spiritual lives of their children than do fathers, but the strongest influence is when both are involved. When students do not respect their parents involving spiritual matters, they are less likely to display lasting faith. This lack of respect could indicate that their parents are not Christians or are not perceived by their children as deeply committed to their faith. It could also indicate that these students are not committed to the faith they see in their parents and are somewhat alienated by that faith. Regardless of the reasons, youth ministers' approach to ministry must include both parents of the youth and not just the students themselves.

How Students Identify with Jesus Christ

This final demographic item was concerned with whether students were Christians as indicated with the way they identified with Jesus Christ. Only two students claimed no significant relationship with him and were excluded from analysis. Those choosing "an example to be followed" were also dropped from analysis because of low numbers. The other two choices were "Son of God" and "my personal Savior." Those who identified with Jesus Christ as Savior (nearly 75%) scored significantly higher than those who identified with him as the Son of God. The choice of "my personal Savior" indicates that students have placed their faith in Jesus Christ and do not just display an accurate knowledge of his identity.

Whether or not students have recognized and accepted Jesus Christ as Savior is very significant to their lasting faith tendency. Those who have made a commitment to follow Christ seem to be much more likely to stay connected to the local church as they grow older. Students who have made no such commitment, even if they believe Jesus to

be who he said he is, are significantly less likely to be a part of a local church after high school. This might seem too obvious to state, but the data confirm that this is a critical issue for churches, parents, and youth ministers. Knowing the faith commitment of students in relationship to salvation is indispensable to youth pastors for gauging the lasting faith tendency of their young people.

Research Implications

In light of the attention by youth ministry educators, practitioners, and other church leaders on the issue of young people leaving the church at or near the end of high school (i.e., Barna 2003, 2006; Black 2006; LifeWay 2007; Lovelace 2006; Powell and Kubiak 2005), the focus of this study has been toward youth pastors and their role in addressing this concern. They cannot affect change in this dilemma on their own.

Parents must take up their God-given role. Pastors must understand the need for transformation in ministry approaches. Churches must adjust their paradigm of youth ministry. This must be a joint effort, but for the most part, youth ministers will have to take the lead.

Existing research explores and helps explain the key influences in the spiritual lives of young people (i.e., Barna 2001; Black 2006; Dudley 1999; Lamport 1990; Smith and Denton 2005). The factors that surfaced as having the greatest influence were parents, peers, other significant adults, and involvement in the church as a whole beyond mere youth ministry participation. Other studies focus on the models of youth ministry best suited to accomplish lasting spiritual change in teenagers (i.e., Dean 2004; DeVries 2004a; Duerksen 2001; Fields 1998; Strommen, Jones, and Rahn 2001; Yaconelli 2007). The models examined in the literature review for this study were purpose-driven youth ministry, congregational youth ministry, family-based youth ministry, and contemplative

youth ministry. Every setting is different and elements from each of these models can be helpful. Brian Richardson express this idea very well: “As a church considers what model of youth ministry it should use, it is important to remember that what is best for one church in a given community is not necessarily best for another church. Instead of copying a particular youth model because it worked somewhere, a wiser approach is to respond to the specific needs of young people in our church or community” (Richardson 2000).

This present study complements the existing research by focusing on the issue of youth leaving the church and youth ministers’ understanding of this dilemma. While churches and even parents may often expect youth pastors to have the best insight into what is happening in the lives of their young people, the results from this study indicate that youth ministers might not know their students as well as anticipated. This misunderstanding is possibly demonstrated in the youth pastors’ under-scoring of the lasting faith tendency (reflected in the LFS scores) of their students. There are other plausible explanations that would also explain the variance in scores, but this knowledge of the lasting faith tendency of students could provide insight that would enhance churches’ ministry to teenagers. Youth pastors need to understand the lasting faith tendency of their youth and the factors that significantly relate to that tendency.

Also complementary to existing research are the results of this study in determining the role of the four domains of influence on the lasting faith tendency of students. All four areas are significantly related to each other and the overall lasting faith tendency of the students who participated. The understanding of the vital role of parents in the spiritual lives of their children is common even if many do not fulfill the role as they should (Dudley 1999, 118; Schwadel and Smith 2005, PortraitsProtTeens.pdf). This study confirmed that both parents’ influence is significant in the lasting faith tendency of

their own young people. But, surprisingly, of the four domains of influence, family influence was less strongly related. Their role should not be diminished. In fact, four of the five significant demographic items bolster the significance of both parents' role in the spiritual lives of their children and the importance of intact nuclear families. There is a strong correlation between a stable and spiritual home life and the tendency of students to stay in church. Youth ministry practitioners must take a serious view of the influence families have on the spiritual lives of young people.

The role of parents might have come into play in this research regarding the informed consent form. As stated earlier, almost half of the students who began the LFS dropped out at the informed consent page in the survey. One youth pastor informed the researcher that parents expressed concern about the survey because of this element. It is likely that other parents felt the same reservations. This issue may have affected the results in terms of the family influence subscale. It is possible that parents who expressed concern to their own children about this part of the LFS might have wanted to see what was in the survey. If they were standing nearby or had asked about the contents of the survey, this could have skewed the results, especially regarding the family influence scores. There is no way to know if this is true, but it is a possibility to consider. This researcher is making the assumption that; in general, the students who completed the LFS provided honest responses to the items in the survey since the results of any individual participant are entirely confidential except for seniors who agreed to be included in follow-up surveys regarding their ongoing church attendance after high school.

The discipleship and spiritual depth domain also demonstrated a highly significant role in the lasting faith tendency of the participating young people. The items associated with this subscale are related to self-directed spiritual activities of students such as personal Bible reading, talking about their faith, choosing Christian friends, and

making the choice on their own to attend church. Their self-directed spiritual activities are significantly related to their lasting faith tendency. No matter how excellent the teaching they receive at church and youth group meetings, it appears that it will not substitute for the spiritual disciplines of which they take personal ownership. Personally making the choice to be involved in the local church instead of simply going under compulsion is also very important. The friends chosen by students play a big role in this domain of influence. Their influence in the lives of youth is highly significant, but the choice of those friends is, in and of itself, an important factor. The teenagers who make the choice on their own to be involved in these spiritual pursuits show a greater tendency to stay connected to the local church after high school. This finding is consistent with previous research conclusions (Lamport 1990, 29; Dudley 1999, 118).

The mentoring and intergenerational influences domain is similarly significant (to the discipleship and spiritual depth domain) in its relationship to the lasting faith tendency of students. The significance of adults other than parents is unmistakable in the lives of teenagers (Barna 2001, 119-43). Caring adults can make an extraordinary impact on the lives of young people even if they come from a solidly Christian home (Lamport 1990, 27). For those students who do not have the benefit of a strong Christian home, these adults can fill the gap in such a way that the youth can still display a vigorous lasting faith. Youth ministers must seriously consider the importance of these adults in their approach to ministry.

Very few would question the influence of youths' peers, but according to the results from this study, theirs is the strongest influence on whether or not these young people will stay involved in a local church during and after high school. This is also consistent with existing research. Barna recognizes that students' interest in church participation is "keenly tied to the involvement of the individual's peer group: Where the

group goes, so go its individuals” (Barna 2001, 134). But the influence goes deeper than mere church or youth group attendance. It has a significant relationship to the spiritual maturity of these young people. These peer relationships and how they can be utilized to positively affect the spiritual lives of students must be examined more fully.

It is critical for those in the church, especially those involved in ministry to middle and high school students, to understand that all four of these domains of influence are vital in their relationship to the lasting faith tendency of youth. These areas of influence seem to converge to have significant sway over the spiritual lives of teenagers. These domains of influence move up and down together in their relationship to the propensity of young people to stay connected to the church after high school. This suggests that a balanced approach that gives attention to each of these areas will be the most effective in helping stop the exodus of young people from local congregations as they near the end of their high school careers. The exercise of a balanced approach to these domains will be discussed in the research applications.

A gap in existing research is how well youth pastors understand the spiritual lives, specifically the tendency to remain connected to a local church after high school, of their students. They may read about and watch young people making their exit, but that does not guarantee they will know why it is happening or what they can do to help stem the tide. It is also legitimate to ask if their concern is very deep about this issue. Youth pastors are often overwhelmed with planning, spending time with teens, keeping their senior pastors happy, etc., that what happens to students post-youth group might not be an issue that draws much of their attention. If their concern for genuine discipleship among their students is what it should be, they will know that if students drop out of church participation, spiritual growth is lacking at some point. The results of this study indicate that there are areas of influence that they must understand and give attention to

that can influence the lasting faith tendency of their youth. With the numbers of students that researchers report are leaving the church (Powell and Kubiak 2005, 51), this gap in youth pastors' knowledge must be addressed. Since the exodus of young people from the church does not seem to have diminished, the indication is that youth pastors do not understand what can possibly make a difference in this phenomenon. Youth ministers are not solely at fault. Parents must assume their God-given role in the lives of their children. Pastors and other ministry leaders must fulfill their proper roles. Churches in general must understand how important is this ministry to youth and gain new perspective about these domains of influence. Yet it is up to youth pastors to lead this vital ministry toward transformation and their understanding of this issue is crucial.

Research Applications

In consideration of the implications based on the precedent literature and the findings of this study, certain applications for youth ministry practitioners come to the forefront. These applications fall under two categories: youth ministers' insight and the domains of influence.

Youth Ministers' Insight

It should not be assumed that youth ministers, while typically closer in age to the young people of the church than most of the other adults, are the experts on youth culture and adolescent influences. At this stage of youth ministry practice though, they should be. Parents should know their children in very personal ways such as personality traits, abilities, likes, dislikes, etc. better than anyone else, but overall knowledge of this subculture falls clearly into the realm of the ones who are responsible for the churches' ministry to this age group. This goes far beyond fad and fashion, popular media, vernacular comprehension, and technical savvy. This researcher believes that youth

pastors must commit themselves to being students of students. Youth pastors have the avenues to do this because they typically have more access to the subculture through a wide variety of teens than anyone else in the church. They need to understand the influences that most affect the spiritual lives of their youth.

Most importantly, this study indicates that it is critical for them to know their own youth groups. Other than interacting with teenagers, they must gain insight from parents, teachers, coaches, and other adults who relate to their youth group members. It does not matter how well they understand youth culture in America, their states, or even their own communities if they do not have more than surface knowledge of the teenagers to whom they attempt to minister on a weekly basis.

This need for a deeper understanding of a particular group of students makes a strong case for longevity in ministry for youth pastors but not just in youth ministry at a variety of churches. Jonathan Grenz conducted a study of members of the National Network of Youth Ministries dealing with the tenure patterns of current and former youth ministers. He found that the mean length of tenure in a youth ministry position of all participants was 4.7 years and the median was 3.1 years. Of those who responded, 15.6% averaged less than two years in a position and only 8.4% averaged more than ten years in a youth ministry position (Grenz 2002). The researcher feels that the need of youth ministers to gain this deeper understanding of their students calls for being on one church field long enough to know the youth subculture of that area, the students and their families on a personal basis, and to see the long-term results of consistent, ongoing ministry in that place. The youth pastors that do this will be the ones that have a much better grasp of the lasting faith tendency of their students and how the domains of influence discussed in this study will enhance that tendency. Longevity can be an important part of finding the correct approach to significantly affect the spiritual maturity

of youth groups. Wright and Graves, in dealing with the issue of youth pastor tenure, conclude, “The church, our students, our student pastors and their families would be much healthier with a longer-lasting relationship” (Wright and Graves 2007, 27). Only as youth ministers develop this level of group and individual understanding will they be able to develop a ministry that works. This application is consistent with the conclusions drawn about youth ministry models from the existing literature. No single approach is right for all groups.

The evolution toward longer-term ministry in single local churches might already be happening, but if youth ministers are not engaged in this level of ministry at this point in time, it may be difficult to help them comprehend the necessity of this mindset. This paradigm of long-term ministry should also be found in churches that want to provide for the most effective means of ministering to their teenagers and the families of these young people. Churches should encourage their youth pastors to make needed changes in their approaches to ministry and give them the freedom and backing to do so. Congregations can better ensure long-term ministry from their youth pastors by adequately supporting them financially and elevating the status of their positions.

The classroom is also an important place to begin to instill this pattern of thinking in future youth pastors. With the rise of professional youth ministry, more and more undergraduate and graduate schools offer courses and programs for training young adults for more effective ministry to students. The classroom is the key setting to foster a new paradigm in the approach to this work. Youth ministry educators should be the ones most aware of these issues and the research that surrounds them and best suited to prepare those entering this ministry.

Domains of Influence

The existing research about the spiritual influences of youth and young adults and the findings of this study confirm that the domains of influence in the LFS are very significant in relationship to the lasting faith tendency of students. There are relevant applications from each of these domains for more effective youth ministry with longer lasting spiritual results in the lives of young people.

Family Influence

Parents' role in the lives of students is crucial. In fact, it may seem to be stating the obvious, but both parents' roles are vital. This research indicates that having one parent that bears the bulk of the spiritual responsibility, no matter how adequately they do so, is inferior in making the greatest lasting spiritual impact in students' lives. The best-case scenario is a nuclear family where a student identifies equally with both mom and dad and where both parents are equally respected in spiritual matters. Findings from four out of five of the significant demographic items in the LFS underscore the importance of a healthy spiritual family life for producing lasting faith in young people.

Since churches have largely taken over the role of being the spiritual "parent" (although parents have abdicated this role), Wright and Graves suggest it is churches' responsibility to ensure the correction of that practice (Wright and Graves 2007, 47). Youth ministries must take the lead in retraining parents in how to make their homes the spiritual center of their children's lives. DeVries agrees with this assessment as he discusses returning spiritual responsibility of parents for their children as the focus of family-based youth ministry (DeVries 2004a, 174). The emphasis in this study on family ministry is not a new suggestion, but a reemphasis of what has already been promoted.

This emphasis on the parents' role in their children's lives does not eliminate the need for youth ministry in the local church but targets a needed shift in focus. Since healthy families are crucial to the lasting faith tendency in students, healthy families must be a central concern for youth ministries. Youth ministers need to begin to see the parents as partners in ministry, slowly passing the responsibility for the spiritual lives of youth back to their mothers and fathers.

How can young adults right out of Bible college or seminary, who often have no, or very little experience at raising children, teach the adults in their churches to reassume this role in their own families? It will not be easy, but worth the process. Youth pastors must ensure that fathers and mothers are given the opportunity to grow in their role as parents and as the primary disciplers of their children. It might be a wise choice for younger youth ministers to find spiritually mature parents to take the lead on this training with other parents. Youth ministries must work hand-in-hand with children's ministries and adult ministries to make sure that this training is emphasized and provided. Since this research underscores the vital nature of the involvement of both parents in teenagers' lives, moms and dads should both be targeted to take advantage of this process. Pastors can help as well by underscoring the need for this focus from the pulpit.

Again, this emphasis on ministry to and training of parents falls into the purview of Christian colleges and seminaries to begin training future youth pastors for this part of their ministry. These schools should offer required courses on family ministry, child rearing, and a biblical view of families' role in the spiritual training of their children. It is the opinion of this researcher that no youth ministry program can be complete without this vital area of instruction. Also, ministry leaders in churches, state conventions, and denominations should begin to promote a more positive view of mature,

family-seasoned youth ministry professionals. This focus on family ministry will be a paradigm change because youth ministers often bear more of the characteristics of the students they lead than of the parents of those students.

Longevity in youth ministry could also aid in the ability to provide this ministry to parents and families. As youth pastors begin to have children of their own, they will be better prepared to address these issues with other parents simply because of their increasing experience with their own families. Churches and denominations can aid in this process by continually promoting youth ministry as a lifetime calling and not just a stepping-stone to “bigger” or “more important” ministry.

Discipleship and Spiritual Depth

The goal of modern youth ministry should aim at discipleship before attendance. Spiritual depth must carry more significance than big crowds at exciting events. The two are not incompatible and the intent is not to categorize all youth pastors of being numbers-driven. Yet sometimes youth ministers get the most kudos when the youth room is crowded, big successful events are taking place, and several rows are filled with teenagers in worship services. It is difficult to focus on something other than that for which they are most congratulated. In discussing the issue of declining conversions in youth ministry, Wright and Graves share the pressure that many youth pastors feel: “Sadly many student pastors are told that the solution to the declining conversions is to work harder or do ministry bigger and better” (Wright and Graves 2007, 31). Pastors, other church leaders, and denominational personnel are often guilty of perpetuating this mindset. The recognition they give is often directed at the outward, highly visible signs of success.

This research suggests that youth pastors must establish foundational practices in their ministries that guide students toward self-directed activities such as personal Bible reading, choosing Christian friends, making intentional choices about church attendance, and utilizing their gifts and abilities in the church. These choices signify a faith that youth have adopted as their own instead of merely mimicking the faith of those around them. This researcher believes that youth ministries should be places where hard questions about spiritual issues are asked and where teenagers are encouraged to ask hard questions. Students should be challenged to deeper levels of faith. Parents, youth pastors, or other church leaders should not be satisfied with teenagers just staying out of trouble. Again, in youth ministry, depth (discipleship) should take priority over breadth (large numbers).

This focus on discipleship is another area that will only change in a widespread fashion over time. Hopefully, the focus is already moving in the right direction. The needed emphasis will necessitate the training of pastors and other ministry leaders as well as youth ministers. Articles, books, and conference sessions have already brought this issue to focus and time will tell if youth ministry is already in the transition. Christian colleges and seminaries are the launch pads for this process. Once churches have begun to refocus on the importance of lasting faith development in their young people, this movement will begin to be self-perpetuating as new generations of youth workers grow out of the ranks of youth groups already engaged in serious disciple-making.

The fifth significant demographic item (how students identify with Jesus Christ) from the LFS is pertinent to this discussion. In this study, students who understand who Jesus Christ is and have accepted him as their personal Savior have a significantly higher lasting faith tendency. The need for young people to accept Christ as personal Savior may seem obvious, but it cannot be neglected by youth pastors. Many

youth will come to youth groups having already made this decision, but youth pastors must make sure that every student has the necessary information to understand and make the decision to accept Christ if they have not yet done so. This emphasis on leading students to salvation must be a priority of effective youth ministry. Some youth ministries might be more focused on evangelism to the partial exclusion of serious discipleship. Other groups might emphasize discipleship and not be as evangelistic. In truth, the two are completely interrelated (Matt 28:18-20). Youth ministries cannot be complete without a balance of these two areas. Although simplistically obvious, this concept is foundational. This researcher believes that it is vital to emphasize that students must be led to a personal and growing relationship with Jesus Christ before they will develop a lasting faith.

Mentoring and Intergenerational Influences

The idea that students need to interact with significant adults other than their parents is not new. Studies reviewed in existing research found this to be a vital influence in their spiritual lives (Lamport 1990, 27; Dudley 1999, 119; Barna 2001, 119-43; Strommen, Jones, and Rahn 2001, 163). Young people come under the influence of teachers, coaches, bosses, and even media figures that may or may not have a positive spiritual impact on their lives. This wide variety of influence in teenagers' lives is why churches, and youth ministries in particular, must ensure that they have the opportunity to be mentored by a variety of spiritually mature adults. This influence is vital for all students whether they come from healthy Christian homes or not. This domain of influence ensures that young people who do not have strongly Christian homes do not have to forfeit the development of a lasting faith. Youth pastors and other significant

adults have the opportunity to step in and fill this gap in their lives so that what is lacking in their homes can be overcome.

Once again, this researcher believes that this emphasis begins as the responsibility of youth pastors. Youth ministers must take the initiative to educate their churches and leaders of the importance of this vital role. Youth pastors must be willing to admit that they are not “Lone Rangers” in the spiritual development of adolescents. Then they must recruit adults who are willing to invest their lives in the lives of young people. The youth ministers then become the leaders and trainers of teams dedicated to growing teenage disciples. The chief task for youth pastors in this process is recruiting and training adults for their roles. This recruiting must go beyond just filling spots with any willing adults. There should be a fairly stringent process for screening and selecting the right workers for the task and there should be no age limits for these roles or educational requirements for these positions.

All of these adult-youth relationships will not (and should not) be a formal discipling relationship. Many adults recruited will simply “rub off” on students by their genuine love and availability. This task of assembling a team of compassionate and mature Christian adults should become an intentional piece of the job descriptions of youth pastors.

Not to be redundant, but this understanding of the importance of other significant adults in youth ministry begins in the classroom. This vital issue must be an important part of the educational process for future youth pastors. This researcher thinks that courses should be taught that teach young adults how to find, recruit, and train other adults to be partners in this ministry. Future leaders in youth ministry should learn to develop lists of qualifications and volunteer job descriptions. They need to be taught to lead a group of adults, many of who will be older than them, into unified ministry. The

effort it takes to implement this focus as a required part of youth ministry education will be well worth the development of new coursework and approaches to this educational process.

Peer Influences

There is no surprise in knowing that peer relationships are important to and play a significant role in nearly every aspect of young peoples' lives (Lamport 1990, 25; Barna 2001, 134). However, the strength of that relationship in influencing the spiritual lives of teens was certainly eye opening to this researcher. The findings of this study suggest that these relationships have a stronger impact on the lasting faith tendency of the participating students than any of the other three domains of influence.

The researcher believes this impact to yield the most significant application of this study: To see young people develop a growing propensity to maintain their connection to the local church, youth ministers must establish an intentional system of "mutual discipleship." Mutual discipleship is when students are given the opportunity to take responsibility for not only their own spiritual growth but for influencing other youth in ways that contribute to their lasting faith tendency, or spiritual depth. This channeling of peer influence could be a catalyst for significant positive spiritual change in many youth groups.

Like the development of the other domains of influence, mutual discipleship is the responsibility of youth pastors to initiate and cultivate. Parents and other significant adults should, of necessity, play a role in making sure these peer relationships are encouraged and provided for (time, transportation, etc.). Youth pastors will be responsible for helping them understand the critical nature of and benefits of mutual discipleship and for establishing training for students so they are not left on their own to

figure it out. Mutual discipleship already takes place, to be sure, but much less than it potentially could. With intentionality, this type of peer relationship could become much more widespread and transforming to individuals and youth groups.

This idea may not qualify for being dubbed a new model for youth ministry, but the data in this study suggests that it should certainly become an essential part of every model. With the influence teenagers have on each other it would be a mistake not to harness this influence in ways that could more significantly impact the spiritual lives of young people than any other single influence. The researcher believes that the findings of this study indicate that this could be revolutionary to youth ministry in general. There are generally many more students than adults involved in youth ministries. This multitude of potential disciple-makers could literally transform churches and communities if they are helped to understand the critical nature of their influence and are trained to take on the role.

For this emphasis on mutual discipleship in youth groups to become a reality, someone will need to develop materials and curriculum specifically designed for this type of process. There are materials that students can utilize to lead small groups of other students, but mutual discipleship involves much more than a weekly meeting. There are issues of accountability with the adults who lead the youth ministries and what happens when the small group is not together. Accountability between students must also be emphasized. It is not the intention of this researcher to develop an entire system of mutual discipleship for youth ministry in this treatment, but to help readers of this study understand the need for this process to be a regular part of working with young people in local churches.

To begin this prospective movement, this concept must be taught in the classrooms committed to developing qualified youth ministers. So much of mutual

discipleship will, by nature of the relationships between students, be informal, but formal training for the ones who will cast this vision and train the young people to be effective at this ministry is critical. As they are encouraged to see other significant adults as partners in ministry, they must see students in the same light.

Research Limitations

The results of the current study are limited by its narrow ability to be generalized. As previously stated, these findings might not be applicable to non-Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) churches. It might not apply to churches that do not have full-time, professional youth ministers. It might also not apply to churches outside of Kentucky and South Carolina. The size of the samples for this study were not what was hoped for, but this researcher believes that the variety of churches, youth pastors, and students surveyed have provided some insight and understanding that will be beneficial to youth ministry practitioners and educators.

Further Research

Research often seems to raise more new questions than it answers which can be very positive if the questions are meaningful and are pursued. This research has raised questions for which answers should be sought through further research.

First, replications of the current research may confirm or contradict these findings. The study could be replicated in different states or with different denominations. It would also be helpful to see a replication without denominational restrictions to broaden the application value beyond SBC churches. The key is to find a way to secure larger sample sizes. Because of the response rates of this study, a much larger population should be targeted so that when the survey is complete larger samples will be available to compare. Also, to ensure a better cross section of a youth population,

it would be helpful to replicate this study in settings where access is available to youth groups gathered together for regular church programming. This will help researchers to gather responses from a wider variety of young people and not just the most active youth who might be more willing to complete the LFS online because their youth pastors asked them to.

Based on the findings of this study and the results of Black's FJYA study (Black 2006), this research could also be replicated with first semester college students. While a necessity for this study, the informed consent form was a hindrance in gathering a significantly larger sample. These students would still be close enough to their high school experience that their lasting faith tendencies would be similar to when they were a part of their home church youth groups and it would eliminate the need for an informed consent form. (Students under 18 would not be included in analysis.) A good resource for this research would be Christian colleges where there would likely be a significantly higher number of young people who were active participants in church while in high school. A qualifying question could be added to the very beginning of the LFS to ascertain if they attended church at least twice a month while in high school, this study's and Black's definition for church involvement (Black 2008, 55). This approach may yield larger samples from which to draw findings and more generalizable conclusions. Follow-up could still be done with these students at the end of their first year or beginning of their second year to see if their LFS scores were good predictors of their ongoing church involvement.

Black is already conducting longitudinal studies with LFS participants who were high school seniors when they completed the survey and agreed to be questioned a year later for better indications of the predicting value of the LFS. Another longitudinal study that would be beneficial would be with youth ministers over their tenure of ministry

in a single church. They would be asked, as in this study, to complete the LFS survey the way they believe their students, in general, would respond. As they repeat the survey every two to three years, the data would demonstrate how their conceptions of the lasting faith tendency of their youth evolve as they know their church and group more intimately. It may also reflect better youth ministry practices on their part and the confidence that comes with improved approaches to ministry. This study may also provide more insight into the benefit of longevity in ministry with a single church.

The significant demographic items of the LFS made a measurable difference in students' LFS scores. More in-depth study of any one of these factors would provide valuable insight into the lasting faith tendencies of young people. Since four of the five items were related to students' families, a helpful study would be how students can still exhibit a significant lasting faith tendency without the benefits of a nuclear family with strong Christian spirituality. The findings from such a study would be beneficial to youth ministries such as those in urban settings that reach out to higher percentages of young people without the benefit of positive Christian influence from their homes.

Various youth ministry models were reviewed in chapter 2 (i.e., Dean 2004; DeVries 2004a; Duerksen 2001; Fields 1998; Strommen, Jones, and Rahn 2001; Yaconelli 2007). It would be helpful to compare how students from youth ministries characterized by these different models score on the LFS. It was stated in the literature review that very few churches would use one of these models exclusively, but churches could likely be found that primarily fall into one of these categories. The results might demonstrate if any of the various models seem to enhance the lasting faith tendency of youth.

Finally, the further research that would best complement this study would be a qualitative research project conducted with the youth pastors utilized in the 12-church

matched analysis. Through one-on-one interviews or group interviews (possibly by state), exploration could be made to ascertain some of the reasons for the variance in scoring that occurred between what youth ministers believed would be their students' LFS scores and how the students actually scored. This project could assist youth ministry educators and denominational leaders in better understanding how to help current and future youth pastors develop more complete ministries that enhance the lasting faith tendency of students.

APPENDIX 1

CORRESPONDENCE REGARDING SURVEY PARTICIPATION

This section contains letters that were sent to all full time youth ministers in churches affiliated with the Kentucky Baptist Convention (KBC) and the South Carolina Baptist Convention (SCBC). The first letter briefly explains the research being conducted and requests their participation and the participation of their youth groups. The next two letters were reminders to encourage more participation from those youth pastors who had not yet taken the survey and for all of them to encourage their students to take part. A link to the Web site hosting the Lasting Faith Scale at [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) was included in all letters. The letters were sent via e-mail from each of the two participating state convention offices. The informed consent that is necessary for minors to participate was a part of the online survey that all students and their parents/guardians were required to complete before the survey was accessed.

Youth pastor,

Young people are leaving the church after high school in alarming numbers. I know that you want to help change that trend because you are committed to their spiritual maturity. I'm doing research on this very subject as I work on my doctorate at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

I want to invite you to participate in a survey called the **Lasting Faith Scale**. It has been developed to measure the tendency of young people to stay connected to the local church after high school. I want you, as a youth minister, to take the survey the way you **THINK** your average student would answer. Then I will compare the answers of youth ministers and youth and see if you are on the same page.

*If you can encourage at least 15 of your students to participate in this survey, I will enter your name in a drawing to win a **new iPod Nano!**

Once you have completed the survey, send the link below to your students and encourage them to participate. This information will be very beneficial to your state convention and to youth ministry in general.

Lasting Faith Scale survey:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=LBe3bqS4d3Yp7DsoP2EqBw_3d_3d

Thanks, and please participate in the survey as soon as possible. There is only a limited amount of time for this research to be conducted.

In Christ,

Wes Sirles
wsirles@windstream.net

Youth pastor,

This is a reminder to encourage your participation in my research by taking the Lasting Faith Scale survey. Only a few minutes of your time will be needed to complete the questionnaire. The information gathered in this research will be helpful to your state convention as well as to individual churches and youth ministries. Here is the link to the survey:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=LBe3bqS4d3Yp7DsoP2EqBw_3d_3d

Remember, I'm asking you to respond to the survey the way you THINK your students, in general, will respond.

If you have already participated, thanks! Please encourage your students again to take part. Copy and send the above link to them.

Every youth minister that gets at least 15 of their students to participate in this survey will be entered in a drawing to win a new iPod Nano. (Yes, I know that many of you already have one. Use it as a give-away!)

In Christ,

Wes Sirles
wsirles@windstream.net

Youth pastor,

Now that summer is over and school is back in swing I want to give you one more opportunity to participate in my research. The Lasting Faith Scale measures the tendency of students to stay connected to the church after high school. It will only take a few minutes of your time to participate, but the responses from you and your students will be helpful to your state convention and to youth ministry in general. Here is the link to the survey:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=LBe3bqS4d3Yp7DsoP2EqBw_3d_3d

I am asking you to respond to the survey the way you **THINK** your students, in general, will respond.

If you have already taken the time to participate, thank you so much! The best thing you can do for this research is to encourage your students to take the survey. (Copy and send the above link to them with your own personal encouragement.)

I've decided to change the giveaway. Youth pastors that have at least 15 of their students participate in the survey will be entered to win a new iPhone 3G. (All service and connection charges will be the winner's responsibility.)

Thanks for your help!

In Christ,

Wes Sirles
wsirles@windstream.net

APPENDIX 2

LASTING FAITH SCALE

This section contains the Lasting Faith Scale (LFS) survey, an instrument designed to measure the tendency of young people to stay involved in church after high school. A link to this survey was made available to full-time youth ministers in Kentucky Baptist Convention and South Carolina Baptist Convention churches. These youth pastors, in turn, made the link available the youth in their youth groups.

This appendix contains a paper version of the LFS. The actual survey was taken online at www.surveymonkey.com. All survey items and demographic items were the same, but the scoring mechanism and scoring instructions were not available to the participants.

Lasting Faith Scale

Scoring Guidelines

<i>Score the Lasting Faith Scale using this as a guide:</i>	<i>Points</i>
NO! = I strongly disagree, or this is not true for me at all	1
No = I disagree, or this is not true for me most of the time	2
no = I slightly disagree, or this is not true for me just over half the time	3
yes = I slightly agree, or this is true for me just over half the time	4
Yes = I agree, or this is true for me most of the time	5
YES! = I strongly agree, or this is true for me all the time	6

NOTE: Reverse scores for items 4, 5, 6, 25, 28, and 29

To be accurate, all items must be completed by a student.

Total the scores for all items for a student. This can be used on a year by year basis to determine if a student is on track toward a lasting faith beyond high school.

Total the scores for all students in a youth group and figure the average score for a group snapshot. This can be used on a year by year basis to determine if the youth group is progressing in a positive manner toward a lasting faith beyond high school.

Put a check mark beside each item for the answer and total scores below.

LASTING FAITH SCALE SCORE CHARTS

Put a check mark beside each item for the answer from the Lasting Faith Scale, then total the scores below.

CHART

A

Items	<i>a</i> NO!	<i>b</i> No	<i>c</i> <i>no</i>	<i>d</i> <i>yes</i>	<i>e</i> Yes	<i>f</i> YES!
1	—	—	—	—	—	—
2	—	—	—	—	—	—
3	—	—	—	—	—	—
7	—	—	—	—	—	—
8	—	—	—	—	—	—
9	—	—	—	—	—	—
10	—	—	—	—	—	—
11	—	—	—	—	—	—
12	—	—	—	—	—	—
13	—	—	—	—	—	—
14	—	—	—	—	—	—
15	—	—	—	—	—	—
16	—	—	—	—	—	—
17	—	—	—	—	—	—
18	—	—	—	—	—	—
19	—	—	—	—	—	—
20	—	—	—	—	—	—
21	—	—	—	—	—	—
22	—	—	—	—	—	—
23	—	—	—	—	—	—
24	—	—	—	—	—	—
26	—	—	—	—	—	—
27	—	—	—	—	—	—
30	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total checks	—	—	—	—	—	—
X	x 1	x 2	x 3	x 4	x 5	x 6
Scores	—	—	—	—	—	—

(A) Total of Columns *a-f*

(continued)

**CHART
B**

Items	<i>a</i> NO!	<i>b</i> No	<i>c</i> <i>no</i>	<i>d</i> <i>yes</i>	<i>e</i> Yes	<i>f</i> YES!
4	—	—	—	—	—	—
5	—	—	—	—	—	—
6	—	—	—	—	—	—
25	—	—	—	—	—	—
28	—	—	—	—	—	—
29	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total checks	—	—	—	—	—	—
X	x 6	x 5	x 4	x 3	x 2	x 1
Scores	—	—	—	—	—	—

Total from
Chart A _____
Plus total from
Chart B _____

Equals your total
Lasting Faith score _____

(B)Total of Columns *a-f*

Lasting Faith Scale

About Me

1. What is the marital status of your birth parents? (select **ONLY ONE** of the following):

- Married
- Divorced
- Other (separated, widowed, never married, unknown (I am adopted))

2. Whom do you live with most of the time?

(Please select only **ONE BEST** answer.)

- Both mother and father
- Mother only
- Father only
- Birth mother and step-father
- Birth father and step-mother
- Other (Grandparent(s), Foster or step parent(s), Adoptive parents, etc.)

3. Which parent do you most closely identify with? (Please select only **ONE BEST** answer.)

- Both parents equally
- Mother
- Father
- Neither parent

4. Which parent do you most respect related to spiritual matters? (Please select **ONE BEST** answer.)

- Both parents equally
- Mother only
- Father only
- Neither parent

5. When I think about Jesus Christ I identify with him primarily as (select **ONLY ONE** of the following):

- An example to be followed.
- The Son of God.
- My personal savior.
- No meaningful relationship.

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ABSTRACT

THE ACCURACY OF YOUTH MINISTERS' CONCEPTION OF THE LASTING FAITH TENDENCY OF YOUTH

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The assumption of the current study is that ongoing church attendance is a foundational component of the quest for genuine discipleship in young people. Chapter 1 examines the problem of the exodus of youth from the church and defines the critical terms for this study. The research questions used to guide the study are introduced.

The purpose of this study was to use Wesley Black's Lasting Faith Scale (LFS) to compare the lasting faith tendency of youth (reflected by their LFS scores) with what their youth ministers believed would be their groups' LFS scores. LFS responses were also evaluated for the effects on scores of the four domains of influence.

Chapter 2 reviews existing literature pertinent to this study. The issues that have been explored are the biblical basis for church attendance, the period of adolescence, spiritual influences of adolescents and young adults, and youth ministry models proposed to better address the issue of genuine discipleship.

Chapter 3 describes the process by which data for this study was gathered. All full time youth ministers in Southern Baptist Convention churches in Kentucky and South Carolina were invited to participate in the LFS survey and to elicit the involvement of their students.

Chapter 4 reports on the analysis of the data from the completed surveys. Results were analyzed concerning the significance on scores of the four domains of influence (discipleship and spiritual depth; family influence; mentoring and intergenerational influences; and peer influences). Youth ministers' scores (predictive of their students' scores) and student scores were compared. Finally, the effects of significant demographic items relating to students' family life and their identification with Jesus Christ were examined.

The final chapter presents the researcher's conclusions based on the findings of this study. All four of the domains of influence had a strongly significant relationship with students' lasting faith tendency. Youth ministers scored significantly lower on the LFS than the students. The possible reasons for this variance are explored. The strong variance shown in student responses according to the significant demographic groupings is also examined. Based on the results of this research, applications are made for the practice of youth ministry in local churches. Suggestions for further research are offered.

Key words: Adolescents, church attendance, discipleship, lasting faith, youth ministry

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