



- RETENTION & TRANSITION -

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For

Effective Ministry

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RESEARCH PAPER

RETENTION & TRANSITION

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- A Brief Note On the Following Research Material –

The following research paper is the result of a core literature review of more than 60 books, articles, blogs and websites in the area of *managing transitions in youth and children's ministry*, primarily sourced from Australia, England and North America. Statistical data documented in the paper was drawn from a number of sources both secular and Christian, including *NCLS*, *ABS*, *McCrindle Research*, the *Barna Group* and the *United Nations Statistics Division*.

The statistical findings of this paper were confirmed and complemented by an extensive field study questionnaire conducted with over 22 Youth and Children's Ministers across all metropolitan regions in Sydney, as well as a number of in-depth personal interviews with several senior experts and trainers in the field. For consistency of analysis and approach, the field questionnaire was specifically designed to correlate with the research framework used in the literature review.

It's important to understand that this paper on '**Retention and Transition**' is largely a 'follow on' from our original research piece specifically focusing on '**Youth and Children's Ministry**'. Those who've read the first paper will recognise the re-inclusion of some of the corresponding data and information relevant to the topic of 'retention and *transition*', that material has now been complemented by further research and corresponding new data, with specific implications for retention and managing transitions fleshed out. To further appreciate the contextual contours of the research outlined in this document it's worthwhile to supplement this paper by also reading that foundational piece.

This paper is by no means designed to be an exhaustive analysis of the subject under question, but has been deliberately kept concise for the purposes of this project.

Effective Ministry seeks to build effective disciple-making ministries, through evidence-based research combined with theologically sound practice, therefore the following material has been our attempt to integrate *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxis* in the area of *retention and managing transitions*.

RESEARCH PAPER - RETENTION & TRANSITION -

“Today, as middle adolescents leave the energy and relational focus of the youth ministry program, they often wander out the door of the church. Where do graduated disciples go when they're done with the youth group? How do we help them?”¹

“Given the seeming importance of retaining youth for most religious groups...it is striking how haphazardly most congregations go about it”²

(A) AN ALL TOO COMMON STORY...

A youth minister tells this story...

“Gwen had graduated two days before, but without even thinking she showed up at church and went through her normal routine: standing outside the high school Sunday School room, talking and laughing with a few of her friends from the youth group. When the leader called the meeting to order, she walked into the large room with the rest of the students and took her regular seat on the carpeted steps along the far wall.

At first she didn't notice anything out of the ordinary, but soon she realized that several whispered conversations were pointed in her direction. She couldn't quite understand what was going on—maybe she had said something dumb walking in—but she could tell that most of the others were kind of staring at her. Before she could piece together what was happening, the youth leader sat down next to her and said, “Gwen, you're a graduate now. You get to go into an adult class. You don't have to hang out here with these little high school kids.”

Gwen was dumbstruck. How could she not have known this? It never quite occurred to her that she no longer would be welcomed in the only real Christian community she'd ever known. Her parents didn't go to church, and she had no deep relationships outside of this group, but her church wasn't set up for keeping graduates in their youth ministry program. She had to move on; and although the leaders were being nice about it, the way the program was structured she was no longer welcome. She was “finished” with youth ministry, but where should she go now?

Her friends, parents and church didn't have an answer for her”³

Sadly, research tells us that Gwen's story is not all that uncommon. Even in the most organized of churches that have lively and well structured youth, children's and young adults ministry, there can often be a lack of joint cohesion, forethought, and intentional ministry management of the various 'people movements' and 'transitional life stages' that occur in the congregational life and experience of young believers (if any management at all).

As a result, this can not only generate a significant loss in **social** momentum for the young individual, exacerbate **emotional** uncertainty and change anxiety, but for many, the lack of 'transitional programmatic intentionality' on our part can also potentially lead to - **spiritual** disorientation, disengagement from church life, and for some, loss of faith.

¹ Chap Clark: 'Strategic Assimilation: Rethinking the Goal of Youth Ministry' (Youthworker website: Mar. 2011) <http://www.youthworker.com/youth-ministry-resources-ideas/youth-ministry/11624001/>

² Dr. K.E. Powell and Dr. C. Clark: Sticky Faith: (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011) p.27.

³ Chap Clark: 'Strategic Assimilation: Rethinking the Goal of Youth Ministry' p.1

This paper is an attempt to examine the factors surrounding youth drop out and disengagement as it relates to a failure to adequately address important life transitions, and to propose possible ways forward in developing and executing a more effective means of - *transitional programmatic intentionality* within our church ministries.

(B) IDENTIFYING THE ISSUES: WHAT THE DATA IS TELLING US:

1:1. Early Years are Critical:

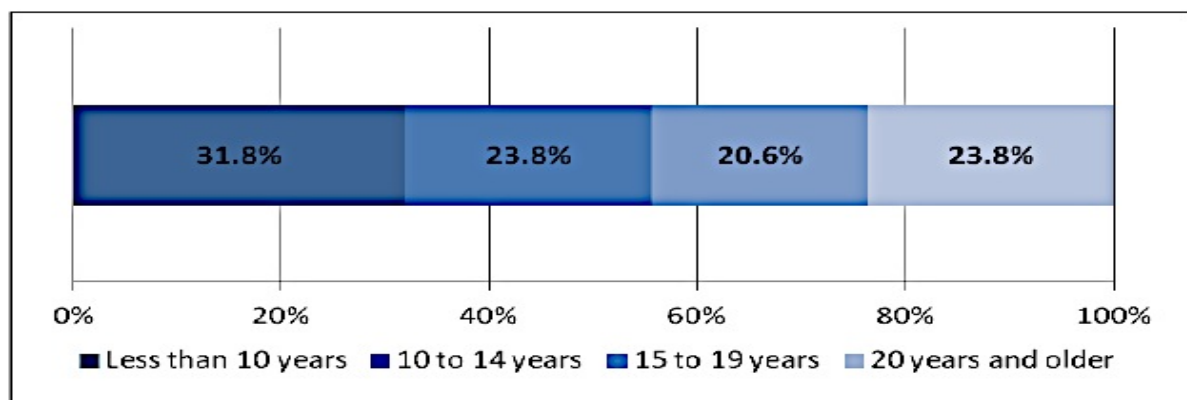
*"Social scientists have known for years that the moral foundations of children are generally determined by the time the individual reaches age nine. ... Anyone who wishes to have significant influence on the development of a person's moral and spiritual foundations had better exert that influence while the person is still [young]."*⁴

According to 2011 NCLS data, within our local context, the number of Sydney Anglicans indicating that they became *Christian prior to 20 years of age* was **76%** (compared to 79% in the 2006 survey, and 76% in 2001).⁵

Of those that became Christian *under the age of 5*, they were most likely to have parents who were both Christian (66%) compared to the older *teenage years* (15-19) with both parents Christian (25%).⁶

Importantly, the 10 -year age band covering the teenage years (10-19) was the age in which nearly half (44%) of Sydney Anglicans reportedly became Christians. Nearly one in four Sydney Anglicans (24%) became Christian *after* the age of 20.

Figure 3: Age became a Christian, Sydney Anglicans, NCLS 2011



At a comparative level, Sydney Anglicans are *more likely* to report becoming Christian in their teenage years (44% compared to 36% nationally), and *less likely* to report becoming a Christian *prior to 10 years* of age when compared nationally (32% compared to 41%).⁷

⁴ George Barna: *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions: Why Children Should be your Church's #1 Priority* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2003) p.47.

⁵ It should be noted that these statistics exclude another 5% of attenders who did not know at what stage they became a Christian. *Becoming a Christian: A Report from The 2011 National Church Life Survey for the Anglican Diocese of Sydney*. Prepared for Anglican Youthworks. Anglicare: Diocese of Sydney, Social Policy and Research Unit (updated version -September 2013), p.8.

⁶ In stark contrast to those who became Christians between the ages of 30-39 were least likely to have both parents who were Christian (only 7%). Interestingly, for people who became Christians during the ages of 15-19, the proportion of converts from non-Christian families (32%) was roughly similar to the proportion from families where both parents were committed Christians (25%). This suggests that youth ministry could-and should- play a pivotal role in bringing children from a range of family backgrounds to Christ. *Report from The 2011 National Church Life Survey for the Anglican Diocese of Sydney*. P.24.

⁷ It was noted in the report that these differences may reflect theological differences in the understanding of 'conversion' amongst different denominations. For example, the majority of attenders in the national sample who have a Catholic or Anglo-Catholic orientation reported becoming Christian prior to the age of 10

The prior study (mentioned in our previous paper) conducted in 1991, found that the number of Anglicans and Protestants indicating they became Christian *under 5 years* was (23%), with proportions for the next three age groups being roughly the same: 5-9 years (16%), 10-14 years (18%) and 15-19 years (16%).⁸

Interestingly, Barna's book: 'Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions: *Why Children Should be your Church's #1 Priority*', in some ways paints a not too dissimilar picture in the US in regard to statistics on youth and Christian confession. Barna's report reveals that a staggering 93% of young people in the US consider themselves to be Christian *by age 13*, sadly the majority exhibit no grace based relationship with Christ, with only 3% holding a biblical worldview.⁹

According to Barna, fuelling this particular problem appears to be the *focus* and *priority* the church often gives to *older* children without understanding the critical importance of developing a young child's biblical worldview from the earliest years of life, resulting in a lack of strategic focus on reaching children with the gospel and having that faith transition in a transforming way into the teenage years.

The significance of focusing on the development of younger children is further underscored by other research findings indicating that the moral foundations of children are typically solidified by **age nine**, and that lifelong spiritual choices regarding one's faith and one's relationship with Jesus Christ are generally made **before** they reach 13. These findings also indicate that a person's religious beliefs are usually worked out *prior* to becoming a teenager, and that those beliefs **rarely change** to any meaningful degree after age 13.¹⁰

If this is true generally, and not just culturally, then it must surely have significant implications for how we go about the early years of faith development and strategy, as well as implications for transitioning well between those early years of faith development into the teenage years.

It's Barna's belief that younger children should therefore become the primary focus of our ministry (particularly those aged 5-12), believing that if we impart to young children a strong faith then we diminish the likelihood of spiritual and moral problems that later plague the teenage years.

Barna also believes that for growing faith across into the young adult years, it's critical that churches begin to work in mutual *partnership* with *parents*, equipping them to teach and nurture their young children in a biblical worldview.¹¹

Implications for managing transitions: The challenge for us is to intentionally and strategically make use of those early formative years as a God given gospel opportunity to bring children to a living faith in the Lord Jesus at a time when they appear to be much more open to spiritual matters, and to so establish and build upon that foundation with a thoroughly biblical worldview that might enable them to successfully transition to the next stage of spiritual growth and transformation.

years, compared to only a third of Evangelical/Reformed respondents. *Becoming a Christian: A Report from The 2011 National Church Life Survey for the Anglican Diocese of Sydney*. P. 9.

⁸ Building Church: Mission Under The Microscope: NCLS: 1991 p.121.

⁹ Transforming: p.33 & 37.

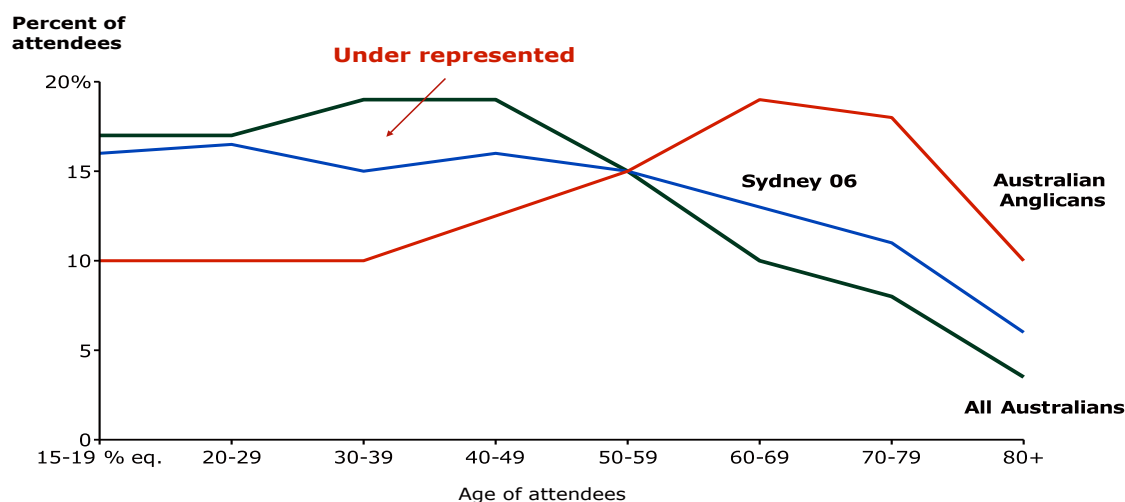
¹⁰ Exit interviews with teenagers revealed that the spiritual foundation laid by families and churches when they were younger is often inadequate. (E.g. Comparatively few early teens indicated they learned enough Bible content to enable them to make important life decisions on the basis of biblical principles. Further, most teenagers have already made up their minds that once they become independent of their parents they will abandon church.) '*Spiritual Progress Hard to Find*': Barna Research (December 22nd, 2003) <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/132-spiritual-progress-hard-to-find-in-2003>

¹¹ Transforming: p.14.

1:2. Under-represented Among Young Adults:

Compared to the wider population demographics, Sydney Diocese is under-represented among young adults (aged 20-39).¹²

The Sydney Diocesan age profile is distinctly different from the rest of the Anglican movement; Sydney remains underrepresented in the 20 to 50 year old age group but shows a solid presence among 15 to 19 year olds



Source: Church life profile p23 NCLS06, exceeds 100% based on optical adjustment to 15-19 year olds, ABS and Census data

Implications for managing transitions: This data (combined with the data reflecting high levels of childhood conversion) would appear to suggest that our ministries are not always effective at retaining our youth post high school. This is either a reflection of poor faith establishment in the early years, lack of adequate ministry transitioning work on our part, or an indication there may not have been solid conversion in the life of the young adult to begin with. Either way, this statistic is concerning and should rightly raise questions about how well we may be approaching ministry to this particular age group.

1:3. A Retention Problem: Youth Loss and Disengagement:

“The ages eighteen to twenty-nine are the black hole of church attendance; this age segment is “missing in action” from most congregations”¹³

“The most important function of youth ministry is longevity. Long-term discipleship... Following Jesus is hard. Faith is difficult. Discipleship requires a huge investment of time. Most of us don't have the time. Or we choose not to take the time. Or our current models of ministry don't allow us the time”¹⁴

This data follows on from the above data, NCLS research indicated a significant attendance dip of congregation members in the post Uni/workforce age group of **20-40** years, as well as a high drop out rate immediately **post high school**:¹⁵

¹² Church Life Profile: 2006 .p.23, exceeds 100% based on optical adjustment to 15-19 year olds, ABS and Census data. The Australian Community Survey (ACS) found that 31% of young adults are married, with a further 12% living in de facto relationships. The proportion in de facto relationships is higher than the national average (6%) and reflects the shift in values that has occurred since the 1960s. Many young adults prefer to live together before committing to a long-term relationship such as marriage. Conflicting views between young adults and churches over sexual issues appears to be one of the main reasons that young adults are under-represented in churches (Why People Don't Go to Church, 2002, p 56).

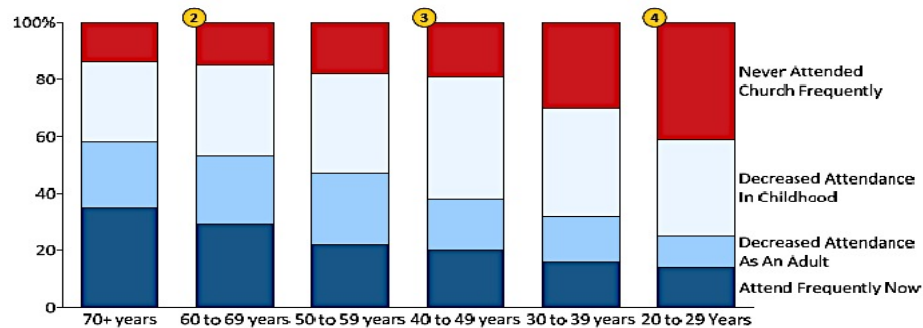
¹³ David Kinnaman: You Lost Me: *Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church... And Rethinking Faith*: (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011) p.22.

¹⁴ Mike Yaconelli (Youthworker Journal, May/June 2003).

¹⁵ Church Life Profile: NCLS: 2006 p.20, 23, and *Building Church: Mission Under The Microscope*: NCLS: 1991 p.121.

* Fig 1: Years 20-40:

Stolen Generations



Source: ACS98 Mission under the Microscope

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* Fig 2: Post High School years:

Of all the denominations, the Anglicans performed the least well in post high school transition stage retention rates. Note also the significance of the critical transition point when young adults leave home and simultaneously, the church.

Dropout Rate	Secondary / Post School	Left Home
Anglican	33%	43%
Lutheran	13%	19%
Reformed	5%	13%
Adventist	9%	29%
Baptist	20%	32%
Presbyterian	29%	33%
Uniting	37%	45%
Methodist	8%	29%

Interestingly, one study conducted in the United States discovered similar concerns, with interesting conclusions:¹⁶ According to their research, between 40 - 50% of high school students graduating from church or youth group will fail to stick with their faith in college. Of the 50%, 80% never planned to.¹⁷

In an attempt to stem the tide, the 'Fuller Youth Institute' (FYI) conducted the '**College Transition Project**' in efforts to identify the relationships and best practices that might better set youth on a trajectory of lifelong faith and service i.e.

¹⁶ Dr. K.E. Powell & Dr. C. Clark: *Sticky Faith*: (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011) p.16.

¹⁷ Important to note in this research is that those in the sample taken tended to have higher grade-point averages, were more likely to come from in-tact families & from churches that had f/t youth pastors. Also important to note is the drop out rate for college & non-college students was not significantly different. *Sticky Faith*: p.16.

"To better understand the dynamics of youth group graduates' transition to college, and to pinpoint the steps that leaders, churches, parents, and seniors themselves can take to help students stay on the Sticky Faith path".¹⁸

Some of the statistical data found the following to be true:

- * **Faith questions ignored:** Kids who left the faith report having questions about faith in early adolescence that were *ignored by significant adults* (parents, pastor, teacher).¹⁹
- * **Segregating kids from adults:** A factor causing kids to shelve their faith is - the *segregation of kids and adults in church*. Kids who attend church-wide services were more likely to keep their faith.²⁰
- * **Relationships with younger children:** Students who *serve* and build relationships with *younger children* the more likely they are to hang on to their faith.²¹
- * **Freedom to express doubt:** Students who feel the freedom and have opportunities to *express their doubts* tend to have more sticky faith. (But less than half of those surveyed shared their doubts and struggles with adults or friends).²²
- * **Missions made no difference:** Short-term mission trips seem to have *little impact* on the lasting faith of young people (they are not more likely to give to the poor or become long-term missionaries).²³
- * **Preparation essential:** The more students felt *prepared for college*, the more likely their faith was to grow.²⁴

In yet a further study focusing on Protestant 18-29yr olds (this time conducted by the Barna Group and explored in David Kinaman's -'You Lost Me: Why Young Christian's are Leaving the Church') found the following:²⁵

- 61% - of those with Christian background reported having dropped out after going regularly
- 58% - said they are less active in the church than they were at 15
- 41% - said they have gone through significant 'doubts' in their faith
- 35% - describe a period they felt like rejecting their parents' faith

Interestingly, there also appeared to be a countertrend:

¹⁸ Having said that, the authors believe that there's no one sticky faith bullet, there's no single reason why kids leave, and no single reason that will make them stay. They believe that young people are complex and their faith is influenced by a host of factors. The core of building a 'sticky faith' is helping kids to develop clear and honest understandings of the gospel and biblical faith. As kids are lead into an awareness of their significant role in the kingdom of God demonstrated through scripture, they would then have the best chance of discovering a faith that is compelling and life giving. Sticky Faith: p.18.

¹⁹ Sticky Faith: p.72.

²⁰ Sticky Faith: p.97.

²¹ Sticky Faith: p.98.

²² Sticky Faith: p.73.

²³ Sticky Faith: p.129.

²⁴ Sticky Faith: p.151.

²⁵ Note: this research data came from individuals who identified as Christian before the age of 18. Kinaman describes this age group as the 'black hole' of church attendance, as 'missing in action' from most congregations. The problem is not that this generation has been less churched than those before them; the problem is that much spiritual energy fades away during a crucial decade of life –the twenties. Kinaman outlines 3 general patterns in those that drop out of the church, he labels each using 3 broad terms: 'Nomads' - those who walk away from church engagement but still consider themselves Christians. 'Prodigals' - lose their faith, describing themselves as "no longer Christian" and 'Exiles' – those that are still invested in their Christian faith but feel stuck (or lost) between culture and church. Kinaman notes that the majority of these dropouts are not walking away from the faith, but putting involvement in the church on hold. That 'prodigals' are rarest of the dropouts; most are either 'nomads' or 'exiles'. Most young Christians are struggling *less* with their faith in Christ than with their *experience of church*. Lost: p. 22-27. A summary of the Barna data research can be found here: <http://www.youlostmebook.org/>

- 42% - said they're very concerned about their generation leaving the church
- 41% - describe a desire for "more traditional faith, rather than a hip version of Christianity"
- 30% - said they're "more excited about church than at any time in their life"²⁶

From research data and individual interviews, Kinnaman proceeded to outline 6 core **'themes'** to describe reasons today's youth have shifted away from the church (and for some, the Christian faith).²⁷

The six 'themes' posited were: The church is...

1. *Overprotective and unwelcoming of creativity and involvement in culture*²⁸
2. *Shallow in its teaching*
3. *Anti-science*
4. *Repressive- particularly in regard to sex*²⁹
5. *Exclusive in a way that conflicts with the open-mindedness, tolerance and acceptance of the surrounding culture*
6. *Doesn't allow the expression of doubt*

Kinnaman believes that what we ultimately discover here is - **shallowness of faith**:

*"The Christian church...has a shallow faith problem because we have a discipleship problem. Moreover, diagnosing and treating shallow faith among young adults is urgent because we have a shallow faith problem among all adults."*³⁰

This diagnosis that current youth drop out rates can be closely linked to the issue of shallow faith is strongly underlined in Brian Cosby's - '*Giving Up The Gimmicks: Reclaiming Youth Ministry From an Entertainment Culture*'. Cosby proposes that one of the reasons teenagers are leaving the church, purposeless and disillusioned with the gimmicks is because they've not been adequately *nurtured* and *established* in the faith.

Cosby notes that we've locked into *entertainment driven* models of youth ministry, and by *numbers driven* church-growth success where we've often become more concerned about being 'attractual' and building numbers than building spiritual depth. The consequences are - high youth drop out post high school, as well as a spiritually and theologically shallow worldview amongst our teenagers. This only leaves teenagers hungering for meaningful answers to life's questions and youth leaders burnt out and dissatisfied with ministry.³¹

Like Cosby, Kinnaman believes this drop out problem is, at its core, a **faith-development problem** i.e. a **disciple-making problem**, that these ministry shortcomings are indicators of significant 'gaps' in *disciple-making*, and in particular, there were **3** crucial areas where these gaps are in evidence, and where the church has a God-given opportunity to rethink its approach to disciple-making:³²

²⁶ Lost: p.27.

²⁷ Kinnaman found there was no single reason that young adults disconnect from the church, but a wide range of perspectives, frustrations, and disillusionments that compel the disconnection. The research findings were compiled into 6 themes that best captured the overall 'drop out' phenomenon. Lost: p.92.

²⁸ Kinnaman found that 'helicopter parenting' and the overall cultural fixation on 'safety and protectiveness' is having a profound effect on the church's ability to disciple the next generation. Kinnaman notes that this overprotectiveness can lead youth to look for excitement outside traditional boundaries e.g. sex, drugs, thrill seeking etc. or other forms of spirituality. Lost: p.98.

²⁹ Kinnaman notes that many youth today are skeptical about the reliability of the original biblical manuscripts; reading the Bible through a lens of pluralism and are less likely to believe the scriptures have a claim on human obedience. Lost: p. 31 & 52. From their research, the authors of *Sticky Faith* discovered that more than 2/3rds of those surveyed would say that being a Christian was all about 'doing' the faith e.g. loving others or following Jesus' example (more than 1/3rd did not even mention Jesus) and about 'sin management' i.e. do go to church, don't do drink, drugs, sex etc. *Sticky Faith*: p.33.

³⁰ Lost: p.120.

³¹ In response, Cosby believes there needs to be a counter to current entertainment and moralistic driven models of youth ministry. The church must reclaim the ground of Christ-centered gospel focussed, 'means of grace' youth ministry. Brian H. Cosby: *Giving Up the Gimmicks: Reclaiming Youth Ministry from an Entertainment Culture* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2012). P. 17f.

³² Lost: p.28-30.

They are:

1. In the area of *relationships* - the church needs to reconsider *how* we make disciples
2. In rediscovering Christian *calling* and *vocation* ³³
3. In reprioritizing *wisdom* over *information* - as we help teenagers seek to know God ³⁴

Kinnaman recommends that older Christians, parents, peers, church leaders and organizations must '*corporately*' respond to these concerns by finding more effective means of '*personal disciple making*' and by the recovery of '*genuine relationships*' within the body of Christ. ³⁵

"Taking our cues from public education, among other sectors of society, we have created a conveyor belt of development that industrializes the soul formation of young people - who eventually become adults with inch-deep, mile-wide faith. The outcome is adult Christians who were not transformed by their faith as children, as teens, or as young adults. How can we expect more after they turn forty?... Some are tempted to believe that spiritual effectiveness is connected to the size of our institutions and the sophistication of our content, but nothing could be further from the truth...does this infrastructure yield more and better discipleship automatically? Our research says no." ³⁶

Kinnaman believes the recovery of *genuine relationships* is central to disciple-making, without returning to relational disciple-making as its focus, the current Church will not adequately prepare the next generation to follow Christ faithfully in a rapidly changing culture.

Implications for managing transitions: From this we can see that the challenge that lay before us in securing adequate life and faith transitions in our youth and young adults is to ask how adequately our ministry is going about the task of *personal disciple-making*, *faith formation* and intentional *intergenerational connection* and *relationship formation* amongst our younger members (let alone the implications for how well we might be going about disciple-making in congregation members of all ages).

1.4. Loss of Parental Engagement:

"Research discovered that tens of millions of parents are satisfied by simply enrolling their children in church programs; they demonstrate little concern about the quality or effectiveness of those experiences" ³⁷

"When a church intentionally or not, assumes a family's responsibility in the area of spiritually nurturing children, it fosters an unhealthy dependence upon the church to relieve the family of its biblical responsibility" ³⁸

³³ Kinnaman believes we need to help youth connect spiritual wisdom with real world knowledge, that we make little effort to help disciples connect the dots between their vocation and their faith, not only in the area of science and education etc. but especially so in the creative arena (music, art, film, writing etc.) p.30, 127.

³⁴ Lost: p.201.

³⁵ Kinnaman's analysis argues that blame for the current youth crisis cannot be laid exclusively on any one group of people, neither will the solution come from the efforts of only one group... "*Relationships grow out of conversations and conversations need more than one voice.*" Interestingly, Kinnaman lists 'organizations' (i.e. publishers, schools, businessmen, churches, ministry organizations) as important influence stakeholders in this process. Lost: p.35.

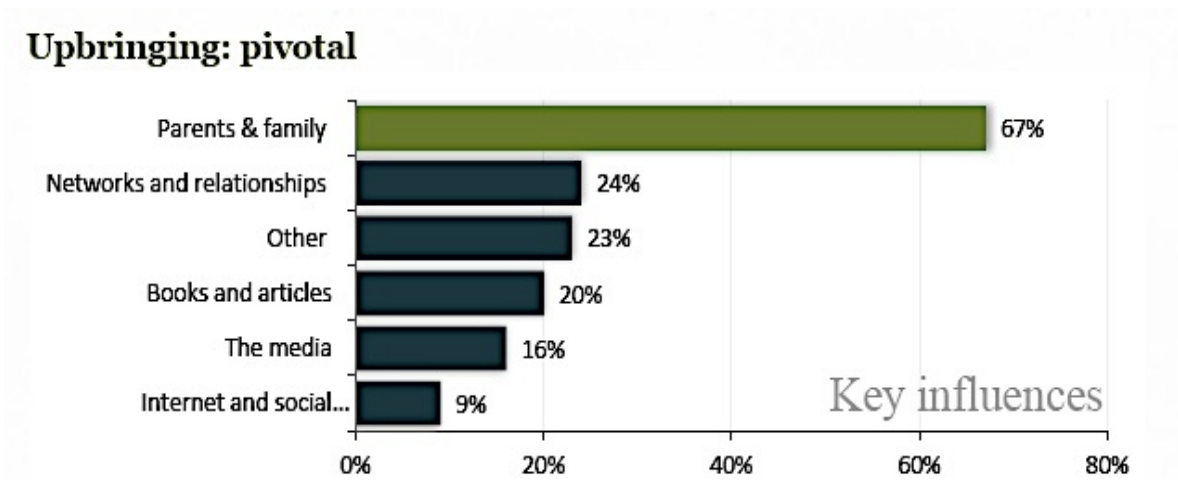
³⁶ Kinnaman's conviction is that in order to address this issue the Christian community must rethink its efforts to make disciples. Kinnaman believes that we've built our work with young people on a method rooted in modern, mechanistic, and mass production paradigms, but disciples cannot be mass-produced, disciples must be handmade, one relationship at a time. What's now needed, are new architects to design *interconnected approaches to faith transference*, a renewal of catechisms and confirmation, and to recognize that here, we have both individual responsibility and an institutional opportunity. Lost: p.12-13, 119-121.

³⁷ Several Barna studies pointed out that most Christian churches evaluate success in terms of program attendance, child satisfaction and parental satisfaction, but do little to examine individual spiritual advancement. However, the ministries having the greatest success at seeing young people emerge into mature Christians, rather than contented church-goers, are those that facilitate a parent-church partnership focused on instilling specific spiritual beliefs and practices in a child's life from a very early age. Sadly, less than one out of every five churches has produced such a ministry. '*Spiritual Progress Hard to Find*': Barna Research (December, 22nd, 2003) <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/132-spiritual-progress-hard-to-find-in-2003>

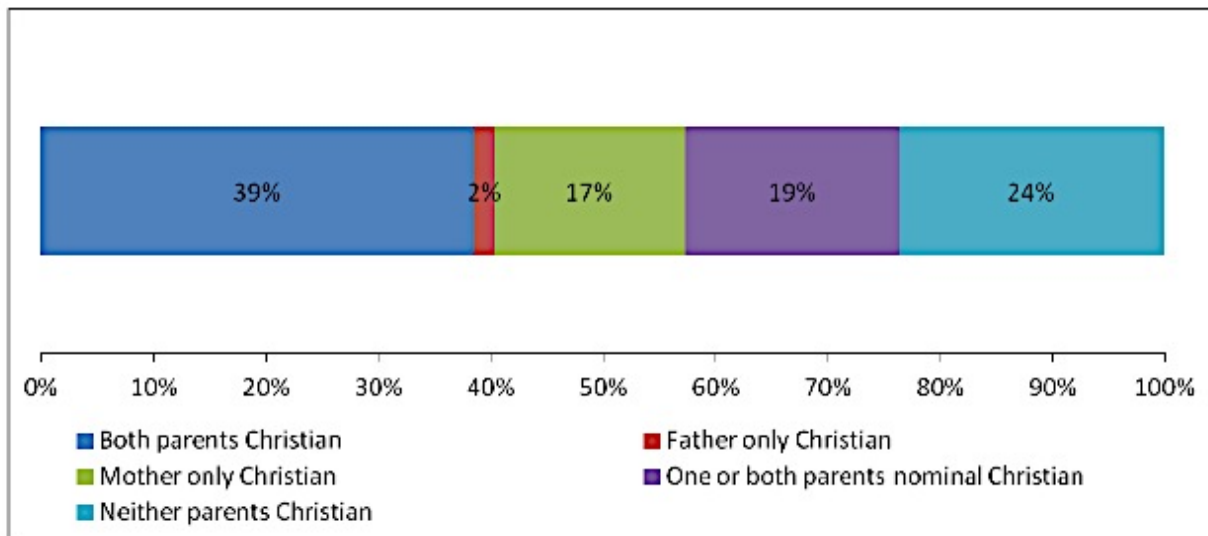
³⁸ Barna believes that God's plan is for families to lead in the provision of spiritual development for their children and will be accountable before God for that responsibility (Deut 1:31; 6:4-9; 11:18-21; 21:18-19; Ps 78:5-8; Lk 8:39; Eph 6:4) Parents are encouraged to work in tandem with reliable spiritual

a. Upbringing pivotal:

The 'Australian Communities Report' findings indicated that upbringing was pivotal in shaping a child's spiritual beliefs, with 2 in 3 (67%) noting the strong influence of parents and families on formatively shaping their adult religious beliefs.³⁹



A recently released *Anglicare* report demonstrated that 39% of Sydney Anglicans identified *both* parents as being committedly Christian when they first came to faith. A further 2% responded to having solely a Christian father and 17% solely a Christian mother, a total of 58%.⁴⁰



B. Parental influence declines as children grow:

The Anglicare report also indicated, that while parents (particularly mothers) have been influential on many Sydney Anglicans becoming Christians, their influence *declines* as children become older. The

partners-such as the Church- but should be sure that those partners are committed to the things of God (1Sam 1:27-28; 3:1-10; Rom 14:19; Eph 4:11-13) p. 82-83. Transforming: p.81.

³⁹ McCrindle Research.

⁴⁰ *Becoming a Christian: A Report from The 2011 National Church Life Survey for the Anglican Diocese of Sydney*. Fig 10: p. 22.

children of Christian parents were more likely to become Christians during childhood or adolescence, whereas the children of non-Christian parents are more likely to be converted during adulthood.⁴¹

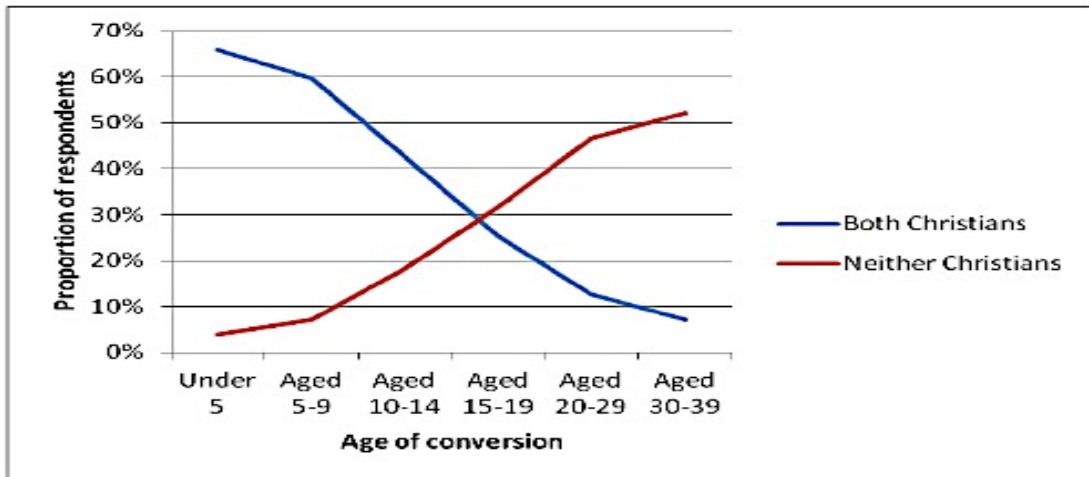
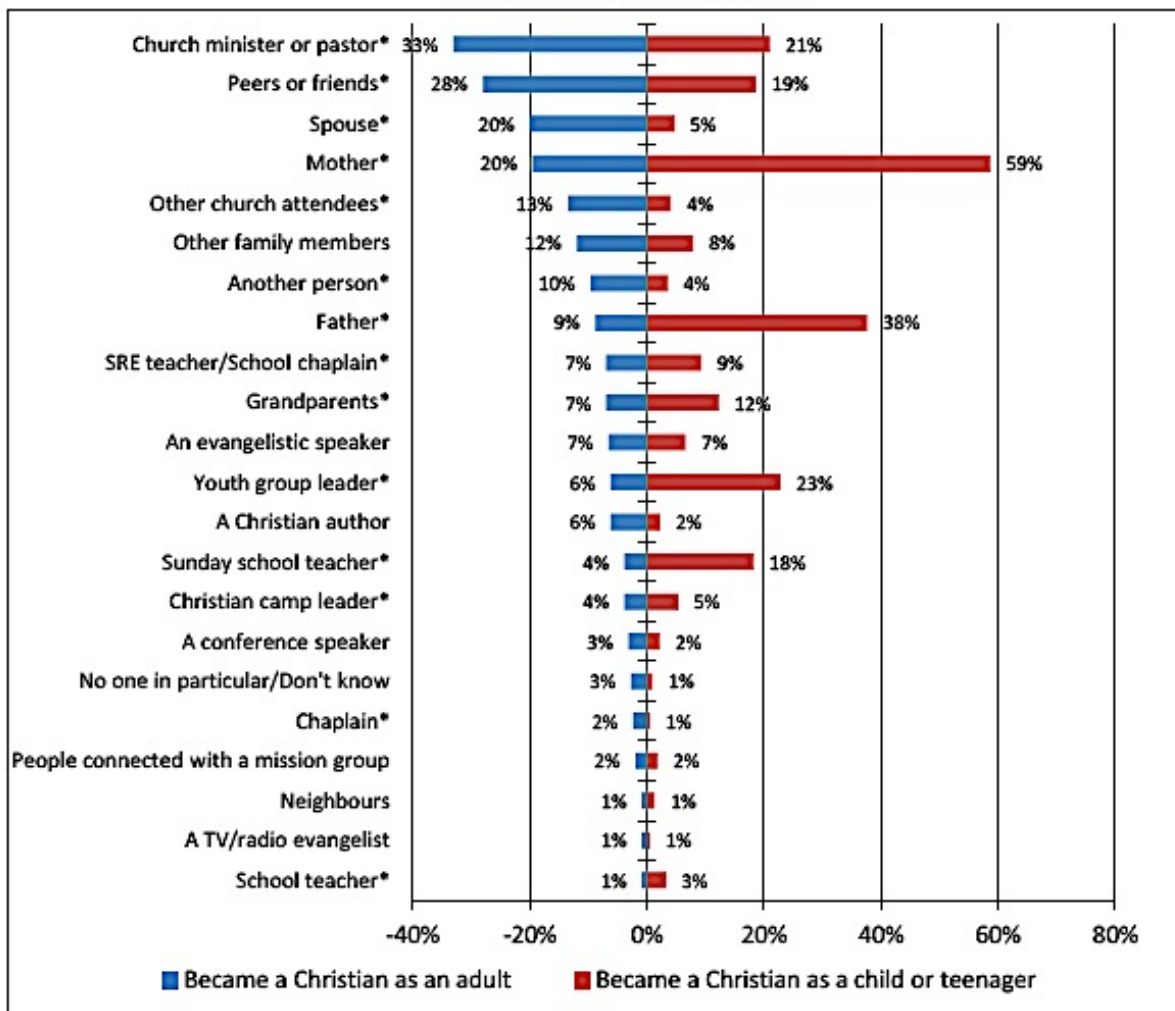


Figure 6: Most significant people in your coming to the Christian faith by age of conversion, Sydney Anglicans, NCLS 2011



* Differences are significant at $p < 0.05$

⁴¹ The report found that critical life lessons and beliefs are principally informed by parents and other important figures of authority. As individuals age, parental influence increasingly gives way to the stimulus of peers and the social environment. *Becoming a Christian: A Report from The 2011 National Church Life Survey for the Anglican Diocese of Sydney*. Fig 12 & Fig 6: p. 15 & 23.

c. By comparison Anglicans do not score well on parental church involvement:

There were also telling findings on parental church involvement across denominations, with Lutheran and Salvation Army scoring highest for involvement of both parents in church life.⁴²

	Both Parents	Father	Mother	Occasional	Neither	Don't Know
Overall	45%	2%	16%	12%	23%	2%
Anglican	39%	2%	20%	13%	24%	2%
Assemblies of God	30%	2%	13%	12%	36%	6%
Baptist	48%	1%	12%	10%	29%	1%
Churches of Christ	45%	2%	15%	6%	30%	2%
Lutheran	72%	1%	8%	8%	10%	1%
Presbyterian	40%	2%	18%	13%	26%	2%
Salvation Army	52%	2%	10%	7%	25%	4%
Uniting	49%	2%	19%	13%	16%	2%

d. Poor practical uptake on spiritual responsibility:

Not only is there a strong relationship between parental faith and children and their children subsequently **coming to faith**, but research also indicates there's a strong link between what happens in the home at a spiritual level and children and adolescents then – **retaining their faith**.

*"Youthful spirituality, in its traditional forms, derives its support principally from families who share it, and it seems rarely to thrive without support from this source"*⁴³

A 2005 NCLS paper on 10-14 year old church attenders (drawn from the 2001 Survey) indicated that one of the characteristics of this age group reducing church participation and drifting away was - *"less religious practice and interaction in the home"*.⁴⁴ The report indicated those in this age group who drifted away from church had *lower levels of practice* at home across the entire range of variables to do with home life. They had lower levels of devotional activity, talked with their parents about faith less often, and prayed less often as a family.⁴⁵

*"This is an important reminder that parents play a central role in the development of faith. The practice of family prayer times, the encouragement of a personal devotional life for children and parents simply being prepared to talk with their children about faith are all aspects that are positively related to higher levels of belief and a more positive attitude and involvement in church life. In this respect churches should consider not only the **quality of the programs** they provide for their children, but also how they might better **assist parents** in their role"*⁴⁶

Interestingly, according to a 2003 American nationwide study (analyzing more than 10,000 personal interviews) the Barna Group found most parents believe they are responsible for the spiritual development of their children, but few parents actually spend time in a typical week discussing or

⁴² NCLS: 1991. Data indicates those before the age of 12 years.

⁴³ R. Webber, Dr. M. Mason & Dr. A. Singleton :*The Spirit of Generation Y: The Spirituality of Australian Youth and Young People Aged 13-29'* (Monash University: Report on Phase 1, Aug.2004)

⁴⁴ *'Survey of church attenders aged 10-14 Years: 2001 National Church Life Survey': NCLS Occasional Paper 7* (June 2005) p. 41

⁴⁵ The study also found 3 other variables that made 10-14 year olds more at risk of decrease in participation or drifting, such as – negative feelings towards church services and children's activities, feeling like their faith is not developing, and having less friends at church. P. 41.

⁴⁶ *Survey of church attenders aged 10-14 Years: p. 45.*

attending to spiritual matters with their children, underscoring the need for churches to help parents address and engage in the spiritual needs of their children more intentionally and effectively.⁴⁷

The Barna research found:

85% parents of children under 13 believe they have primary responsibility for teaching their children spiritual matters.⁴⁸

11% believed the church had primary responsibility

1% said it belonged to the school

19% of parents with children under 13 had never been contacted or spoken to by a church leader to discuss the parents' involvement in their children's spiritual development.

Related research indicated that although parents held this belief, they typically had no plan for the spiritual development of their children, did not consider it a priority, and had little or no training in how to nurture a child's faith.

The research indicated, that for some it was not so much an unwillingness to provide more substantive teaching to the children but that parents often felt *ill equipped* to do so.⁴⁹ The research also noted that sometimes parents are not able to guide their children spiritually because they were also struggling with their own faith development.

Graham Stanton (from Youthworks) notes a further study, surveying parents in a number of evangelical churches in the United States where parents were asked for their perceptions on who was responsible for their children's spiritual growth, and what they do as parents, to help their children grow in faith.⁵⁰

These were the results:

⁴⁷ Like many others, it is Barna's belief that, biblically speaking, parents should have prime responsibility for the spiritual nurture and development of children (and are accountable to God to do so) and that the Church is best poised to assist rather than lead in that process, to act as the secondary support mechanism (Deut 1:31; 6:4-9; 11:18-21; 21:18-19; Ps 78:5-8; Lk 8:39; Eph 6:4). With this order of priority, churches and parents must work in *mutual partnership*, with churches equipping parents to teach and nurture their children spiritually. Barna Study: (*Parents Accept Responsibility for their Child's Spiritual Development but Struggle with Effectiveness*) <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/120-parents-accept-responsibility-for-their-childs-spiritual-development-but-struggle-with-effectiveness>

⁴⁸ Barna's research indicated that while more than 4 out of 5 parents believe they have primary responsibility for the moral and spiritual development of their children, more than 2 out of 3 abdicate that responsibility to the church, and that in a typical week fewer than 10% of parents who regularly attend church with their children read the bible together, pray together or participate in an act of service as a family unit.

⁴⁹ Timothy Paul Jones argues from his research that the problem is often not one of parental ignorance or unwillingness to train their children in the things of the Lord. Rather, the problem is time and training. No time is left to disciple, because parents have permitted school, sports, and other activities to consume all waking hours. While parents hope their children trust Christ, they often settle for "happy, well-paid adults". Timothy Paul Jones: Family Ministry Field Guide: *How Your Church Can Equip Parents To Make Disciples*: (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011) p.102.

⁵⁰ Graham Stanton: 'Are Church Leaders Failing Parents' (Sydney Anglicans Website: Aug 6th, 2010) Quoting statistics from Timothy Paul Jones' forthcoming book.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Parents—and particularly fathers—have a responsibility to engage in a discipleship process with each of their children	0%	0%	0%	4%	34%	62%
Church leaders are the people primarily responsible for discipling my children and teaching them to share the Gospel with others	37%	44%	11%	6%	0%	1%
	Never	Once or less	Couple of times	Three or Four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
How often in the past MONTH have I read or discussed the Bible with any of my children?	20%	10%	25%	10%	9%	26%
How often in the past TWO MONTHS has my family engaged in any type of family devotional or worship time together?	35%	10%	21%	6%	5%	22%

Every parent surveyed agreed it was their responsibility to disciple their children and did not believe that this responsibility primarily belongs to church leaders.

But, the perception of responsibility did not translate into practice. More than 1/2 of families hadn't read or discussed the Bible with their children more than once a fortnight. 2/3rds hadn't engaged in any family devotional more than once a month.

When asked, *'How often in the past year has any church leader made any contact with me to help me to engage actively in my child's spiritual development?'*

The results of the survey were:⁵¹

	Never	Once or less	Couple of times	Three or Four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
How often in the past year has any church leader made any contact with me to help me to engage actively in my child's spiritual development?	68%	12%	14%	5%	0%	2%

From this data, Stanton concludes that:

“One group of God's people and one area of service seems to have been neglected in our churches: that of preparing parents to serve God by raising their children in the fear and instruction of the Lord.”⁵²

Stanton believes that although much of the research in this area has come primarily from the States he does not believe our local situation is far different (as indicated by NCLS research of 10-14 year olds mentioned earlier).

Implications for managing transitions: This data underlines the very significant role parents have to play in early child conversion and faith development, as well as the important role the church has to play as young children transition on to teenage years and benefit from broader influences. It would also appear to raise

⁵¹ *The Family Ministry Field Guide*, (2011): The Family Discipleship Perspectives and Practices Survey was conducted among two hundred and seventy-eight parents attending adult Bible study groups in thirty-six different evangelical congregations in the United States of America.

⁵² In response, Youthworks have developed a website and 'e-newsletter' designed to help parents learn how to disciple their children: <http://growingfaith.com.au/>

significant concerns about how we might better improve levels of parental engagement and active responsibility in the spiritual guidance and nurture of their children.

It also raises the question of what role the church should/could take in equipping and supporting parents in this important task, as well as the need to revisit current models of youth and children's ministry that do not take into account how partnership with parents in the task of spiritual oversight might best be achieved.

1:5. Not Always Transitioning Well:

"I confess...I hadn't given much thought to what we do to our graduates.

Yes, I knew and had taught for years that we in youth ministry should be preparing kids for the "real world" and to take their faith into their next phase of life (e.g. college, work)...

I not only was wrong as I unwittingly cast ill-prepared students into the wilderness of individual and simplistic faith, but I had participated in systemically abandoning them to (hopefully) find for themselves the next community that felt like a fit.

I realize now that even in our best programs we leave students hanging, and our ministries are the losers"⁵³

"We have to face the reality that the college-age years are the biggest disconnecting point for people.

*Church leaders talk about this problem,
but few have developed a strategy that bridges the disconnection"⁵⁴*

Research tells us there are several critical **'transition stages'** in the movement of children and youth towards adulthood and independence, particularly the transition from:⁵⁵

1. Primary to high school
2. Year 10 to senior high or work
3. High school to university
4. University to work
5. Teenagers/young adults leaving home for the first time⁵⁶

Sadly, the research outlined in the statistical data already mentioned in 1:2-1:4 - noted we do not appear to be negotiating these transition points well. We're confronted with significant youth drop out rates post high school, and we also appear to have difficulty retaining our young adults through the challenging university and early working years.

Implications for managing transitions: each of these transitional life stages come with vast differences in emotional, social and spiritual need and will therefore require *thoughtful attention, intentional preparation and supportive oversight* (from peers, parents, churches and ministry staff) in order to collaborate and structure best methods of securing a more helpful transition.

1:6. Intergenerational Engagement Needed:

*"Those who have been sitting at the youth ministry 'kids table' don't know church.
They know youth group, not church"⁵⁷*

⁵³ Clark: 'Strategic Assimilation: Rethinking the Goal of Youth Ministry'. P.1.

⁵⁴ Think Orange: 9.3.

⁵⁵ Other important moments of transition or 'life change crisis' where the likelihood of drop out, or drifting, may increase are 1. The birth of the first child. 2. Marriage to an unbeliever. 3. Divorce or separation. 4. Death of spouse 5. Loss of employment. 6. Major moments of personal change or crisis. 7. Moving from work to retirement. Etc. These all afford important ministry opportunities for intentional disciple growth and concentration on retention.

⁵⁶ Of Australians aged 15-34 years, more than a third (36%) still live at home with their parents (ABS, 2002a). 'Young adults 20-29 year olds' (NCLS Research article)

⁵⁷ Sticky Faith: p.100.

*“Twenty-somethings frequently feel isolated from their parents and other adults in the realm of faith and spirituality. Many young people feel that older adults don’t understand their doubts and concerns, a prerequisite to rich mentoring friendships; a majority of young adults interviewed reported never having an adult friend other than their parents. Can the church rediscover the intergenerational power of the assembly of saints”*⁵⁸

The 2007 *Francis and Richter’s* study found the following as a preventative to attendance drop out:⁵⁹

- * Creating a safe space for people to *share doubts and struggles* in the faith: (16% of general church leavers felt no one at church would understand their doubts, 29% felt questioning their faith would not be acceptable)
- * Allowing children in the church to see *adults practising their faith*: (39% of church leavers considered church to be a “childhood activity” which they outgrew)

The 2003 *Barna* research indicated similar statistics and conclusions:⁶⁰

- * A factor causing kids to shelve their faith is the *segregation of kids and adults in church*. Kids who attend church-wide services are more likely to keep their faith.⁶¹
- * Students who *serve and build relationships with younger children* the more likely they are to hang on to their faith.⁶²
- * Kids who left the faith report having questions about faith in early adolescence that were *ignored by significant adults* (parents, pastor, teacher).⁶³
- * Students who feel the freedom and have opportunities to *express their doubts* tend to have more sticky faith. (But less than half of those surveyed shared their doubts and struggles with adults or friends).⁶⁴

Implications for managing transitions: Both of these studies indicate a critical need for greater *cross-generational relationships, disciple-making intentionality* and attending to *faith concerns* in promoting spiritual growth and guarding youth retention. However, the challenge for our churches is current ministry and congregational structures often unwittingly preclude the real opportunity or likelihood of forming deep or lasting cross-generational Christian contact, let alone intentionally structured for sustained relationship formation and disciple-making across generations.

To make this sort of ministry happen would require a willingness to modify existing structures and address our traditional demographic driven culture in order to make these kind of intentional relationships and disciple making activities possible.

⁵⁸ David Kinnaman: *You Lost Me: ‘Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church... And Rethinking Faith’*: (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011) p.29.

⁵⁹ Francis L & Richter P: *Gone for Good? Church—Leaving and Returning in the 21st Century*, (Epworth: Peterborough, 2007)

⁶⁰ Barna Study: *‘Parents Accept Responsibility for their Child’s Spiritual Development but Struggle with Effectiveness’*: <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/120-parents-accept-responsibility-for-their-childs-spiritual-development-but-struggle-with-effectiveness>

⁶¹ Sticky Faith: p.97.

⁶² Sticky Faith: p.98.

⁶³ Sticky Faith: p.72.

⁶⁴ Sticky Faith: p.73.

(C) TOWARDS ADDRESSING THE ISSUES:

*“We need to be wise, strategic and good stewards of the groups that the Lord has placed in our care.
It’s important as a youth leader that you constantly review the transition
times and strategies for your youth ministry.
Plug any gap that appears between the children’s ministry and the youth ministry.
Make sure you move junior high’ers up at the right time in the right way.
Work at connecting your grads with the group above or a group at their prospective university.
The bottom line is simply this:
- if we want to grow (or even stay the same), we need to keep what we’ve got”⁶⁵*

Many of the findings from the data analysis mentioned were subsequently confirmed and complemented, not only by *anecdotal evidence* from interviews with key players and experts in the field, but through written responses to an extensive ‘*Field Study Questionnaire*’ to youth and children’s ministers across the Diocese (see Appendix), and through a broad based examination and review of Christian *literature* written specifically on youth, children and young adults ministry (both within our local context and internationally).

Although no ‘one’ silver bullet was proffered by any of the research mediums in response to the current challenges in youth retention, there was fairly consistent *overlap, complementation* and *commonality* across all research mechanisms in an attempt to identify and outline specific strategies aimed at addressing a more effective means of – ‘*transitional programmatic intentionality*’ within our church ministries.

The strategies proposed were: the need for ministries to develop the following ...

1. Transitional programmatic intentionality is key
2. Unified ministry theology and philosophy
3. Discipling and disciple-making for life
4. Parental partnership is necessary
5. Intergenerational (over multigenerational) relationships
6. Equip, manage and prepare for transition

⁶⁵ Ken Moser: *Changing The World Through Effective Youth Ministry* (Vancouver: Changing The World Press, 2004).

2:1 Transitional Programmatic Intentionality is Key:

*“I wish there was more of a transition.
It seemed like when I was done with high school, everything ended really fast”*⁶⁶

*“God is not the friend he was in high school. He’s now more like the grandparent in the home
that I only visit on holidays or special occasions”*⁶⁷

What are ‘transitions’?

The dictionary defines ‘transition’ as the change from one state or phase of life to another, or a change in circumstances. Transitions occur throughout our life, and all children and young people face many transitions as they move from dependence to independence; from childhood through puberty and adolescence to adulthood; and from immaturity to maturity.⁶⁸

The difference between ‘change’ and ‘transition’:

It’s imperative to understand as we examine this issue that the concept of change and transition are not the same.⁶⁹

Rhett Smith describes the important distinction this way:

*“Our society confuses them constantly, leading us to imagine that transition is just another word for change. But it isn’t...Change is **situational**. Transition, on the other hand, is **psychological**.*

*It’s not those events, but rather the **inner re-orientation** and **self-redefinition** that you have to go through in order to incorporate any of those changes into your life. Without a transition, a change is just a rearrangement of the furniture. Unless transition happens, that change doesn’t work, because it doesn’t ‘take.’*

*Whatever word we use, our society talks a lot about change; but it seldom deals with transition”*⁷⁰

A college student described this ‘inner re-orientation/re-definition’ that can be provoked by a period of transition this way:

“I heard someone say “the fence is down,” and by that they meant the fence of your school, your family, your church, your friends, who were once a fence around you, saying, “This is the type of person that you are,” or “This is what you are and are not allowed to do,” or “This is what is and is not appropriate.” That fence drops way down as soon as you get to college, and I saw that instantly. First day on campus, your parents drive away, no one knows you...Suddenly

⁶⁶ Sticky Faith: p.149.

⁶⁷ Dr. K.E. Powell, B.M Griffin and Dr. C.A Crawford: Sticky Faith: *Youth Worker Edition*: (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011) p. 19

⁶⁸ In addition, some children and young people experience critical events and transitions as a result of, for example, moving home or leaving home, starting or moving school, bereavement, separation, divorce, illness (their own, parents or a siblings) changing friendship groups etc. Young people and children will need help and support from peers and adults to successfully make the transition to the next stage in their life. The nature and timing and giver of the support will very depending on the individual’s needs and circumstances.

⁶⁹ Carl Pickhart defines ‘change’ as “an ongoing process that keeps upsetting and resetting the terms of people’s existence all their lives, moving them from an old to new, same to different, familiar to unfamiliar, known to unknown state or circumstance...operationally, it can be identified as anytime one or more of four shifts occur – something in your life starts, stops, increases or decreases”. Carl E. Pickhardt: ‘*Educating Adolescents About Coping With Change*’ (Psychology Today Website: April 6th, 2012) <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/surviving-your-childs-adolescence/201204/educating-adolescents-about-coping-change>

⁷⁰ Rhett Smith: ‘*Anxiety in the In-Between Stages of Our Lives: Healthy Strategies for Coping with Transition*’ (Fuller Youth Institute Website) <http://stickyfaith.org/articles/anxiety-in-the-in-between-stages-of-our-lives#fn-2-a>

I was faced with this situation in which I literally could have re-created myself in some ways if I wanted to, and nobody would have known that I had ever been any different”⁷¹

Critical moments of Transition:

As mentioned, research tells us there are several critical **‘transition moments’** in the movement towards adulthood and independence that demand our careful attention, intentional preparation and supportive oversight.

For example:

1. Primary to high school
2. Year 10 to senior high or work
3. High school to university
4. University to work
5. Teenagers or young adults leaving home for the first time

These significant moments of ‘life change’ and ‘stage change’ can generate constant flux, adjustment and recurring upheaval for children, youth and young adults. They come with all the attendant personal and social challenges of change - not just *physiologically, emotionally and psychologically*, but *spiritually* as well. The force of these changes to potentially confuse, disorient, disrupt or derail an individual’s confident transition to adulthood, independence and maturing faith cannot be underestimated:

“I have no clear concept of God now- and I probably did in high school, although it’s hard to construct the way I thought then. I have begun to pull out of my crisis of faith-I think-and I am sure that God exists. But now my philosophical views very much tend towards irrationalism and a kind of nihilistic skepticism, so I have a lot of trouble coming to terms with Christianity. I am trying to believe, but I’m not sure whether I’ll ever be able to do it again”⁷²

Therefore every effort must be made on our part to provide all the necessary support, encouragement and spiritual nurture, to not only help youth deal with ‘change’ but to help them make a healthy **‘transition’** across these difficult life stages.

Unfortunately, research has identified that both families and churches often do not appear to recognize, let alone manage these important transition stages as strategically and effectively as we might hope. It’s become clear that our relationships and our ministries are sometimes lacking in **‘structured and programmatic intentionality’** in the way we go about retaining and transitioning children, youth, and young adults across the various stages of life and Christian maturity.

Rhett Smith outlines examples of lack of ‘transitional intentionality’ this way:⁷³

* As parents and youth leaders we tend to talk to our kids a lot about the change of moving from high school into college, yet we don’t properly prepare them for the transition that awaits them. Change is going to college. But the **transition involves tasks** like learning to deal with peer pressure, self-managing projects at school, taking responsibility for one’s actions, dealing with confusion over majors and career choices, navigating sexuality on campus, or the constant wondering of where God fits into a college student’s life.

* As youth leaders we talk to our kids about the change that divorce brings about in their lives, but we don’t adequately address the transition they encounter. Change is the divorce itself. But **transition encapsulates the emotions** that a kid might experience of feeling unloved, the

⁷¹ Sticky Faith: Youth Worker Edition: p.49.

⁷² Dr. K.E. Powell, B.M Griffin and Dr. C.A Crawford: *Sticky Faith: Youth Worker Edition*: (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011) p.27.

⁷³ Anxiety in the In-Between Stages of Our Lives.

disorientation of shuttling between two different homes, and the identity confusion of constantly questioning where they fit in and belong.

* As parents and youth leaders we talk about the change of kids needing to “own” their faith as they become older, but we don’t talk about the transition that is involved. Change is making a decision about whether to go to church or not. **Transition involves the struggle** that many experience as they sort through what their essential theological beliefs are and how they are to be practiced; it involves the self-differentiation that it takes to stand up for what you believe when lots of your friends may be challenging those beliefs; it involves the restless wandering of trying to find a faith community where one can belong.

It soon becomes clear that much greater attention and forethought must be given on our part to creating specific strategies and designing appropriate ‘transition programs’ that are intentionally tailored for **each particular age group** and **each transitional stage**.

It also becomes clear that we must address these transitional needs ‘holistically’, in all aspects of the person (i.e. spiritually, emotionally, psychologically & socially), if we’re to assist individuals to consciously and comfortably bridge across each transition.

Research also recognized the need to provide clearer **relational support structures** and encourage **intentional disciple-making relationships** across parents, peers and other Christian adults in order to make effective and appropriate relational support happen.

Whatever structures or strategies we choose to put in place, our aim must be to ensure a seamless, secure and confident movement *between* and *across* each transition stage, and provide a process that enables each individual to develop into an established, fully devoted and mature follower of Christ Jesus at the end.

2:2 Unified Approach to Ministry:

“The overall vision of the church is not as clear as ours.

We share the same buzzwords of ‘Connect’, but the youth discipleship pathway makes it much clearer for each individual how they can grow as disciples specifically as part of being in Youth”

- Youth Minister: Sydney -

One of the obstacles confronting churches in the development of an effective transition programme for youth, children and young adults can be the lack of unified approach to ministry strategy and practice across church substructures.

Both the literature and Field Questionnaires confirmed that it was not uncommon for there to be *conflicting aims*, lack of *directional clarity*, or general *disconnect* between the broader church vision and its implementation across the various ministry substructures within it (i.e. between children’s, youth, young adult and adult ministry).

There can also be differences in *ideology*, lack of *combined articulated vision*, or little or no *strategy integration* across or between the children’s ministry, youth ministry, young adults and adult ministry. It is not entirely uncommon to find ministry sub-teams ministering as separate ‘silos’ *alongside* each other, and *independently* of each other, and at times even in competition with each other for limited church resources or in recruiting of volunteer leadership.

“We [Children’s & Youth Ministers] have never sat down as two teams and talked about how this philosophy connects...which I now realise we should” - Children’s Minister: Sydney

This ministry disconnect can create enormous gaps between ministries, and can make generating a helpful, clear and constructive discipleship pathway and ministry transition for children, youth and young adults across the various groups, ministries and pastoral staff much harder.

“The Youth ministry doesn’t relate formally with the Children’s ministry because the Children’s ministry doesn’t have an articulated vision, though of course they’re trying to see kids saved and built up as disciples. It’s just not articulated”- Youth Minister: Sydney

It’s therefore important for churches to begin to develop a *clear, articulated* and *unified* theology and philosophy of approach that enables the practical and spiritual movement of individuals through children’s, youth, young adult to adult ministry, with each stage becoming a more mature version of the same *disciple-making* goals and outcomes, rather than something completely different.

Ministry staff, parents and the broader church must develop a *unified* and *intentional* approach, not only to ministry theology and philosophy, but also to specific transitioning *goals and processes*, ensuring that through *combined* effort and *common* vision, children, youth and adults are supported, nurtured and actively assisted through the changes, and not allowed to fall through the ministry cracks.

2:3 Discipling and Disciple-Making for all of Life’s Transitions:

*“Train up a child in the way he should go,
And when he is old he will not depart from it”⁷⁴*

“As a pastor, I want what’s spiritually best for those I lead. I want them to understand Christ’s will from a spiritual perspective, and my goal in ministry is ultimately to present them mature in Christ. This spiritual focus can require me to tackle tough decisions or conversations, but it definitely requires a strategy for lifelong discipleship”⁷⁵

One of the most frequently raised issues across the scope of the research (i.e. literature, data research, and field questionnaires) was a common concern regarding *youth retention* and *drop out rates*, *Christian longevity*, *shallowness of faith*, and the apparent lack of *intentional discipling* and *disciple-making* within children’s, youth and young adult ministries.⁷⁶

The aforementioned data indicated that a strong corollary could be made between our capacity to retain and transition our children, youth and young adults through these important crisis points, and the adequacy or effectiveness of our *disciple-making* strategies.⁷⁷

Note Kinnaman:

“...the Christian church has a shallow faith problem because we have a discipleship problem...Too many are incapable of reasoning clearly about their faith and unwilling to take real risks for Christ’s sake. These shortcomings are indicators of gaps in disciple-making”⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Proverbs 22:6.

⁷⁵ Chuck Bomar: Think Orange: Church and Families joining Together for More Effective Ministry (Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 2009) 9.3.

⁷⁶ The verb ‘to disciple’, describes the *process* by which we encourage another person to be such a follower of Jesus; it means the *methods* we use to help that person to become mature in Christ and so be in a position where they may then disciple someone else. By ‘discipling’, Al Stewart best describes the term as – ‘more than simply evangelizing unbelievers, discipling is defined as: prayerfully and faithfully building people up until they are mature followers of the Lord Jesus (Col1:28). Discipling is moving people forward in their knowledge of God; in their commitment to Christ; and in their commitment to serving others’. (No Guts: p64-65). The term ‘disciple-making’ is when those same believers go on to help others become what they themselves are – disciples of Christ. Hawkins describes it this way – ‘Making disciples is not a course or curriculum but ‘the implanting of the passion to follow Christ from one person to another’ and ‘the mark of a trained disciple is their capacity to go and help make a disciple of someone else’ (Fruit: p. 97,121). In this regard, true discipleship and disciple-making must be understood as a *process* not a program.

⁷⁷ Note in particular the section on ‘Youth Loss and Disengagement’ in point 3.2 of this paper.

⁷⁸ Lost: p. 120.

And a local practitioner in the field:

“The old models of youth ministry and children’s ministry seem to be unintentionally making attenders but not disciples” - Youth Minister: Sydney

In response to these concerns, the research affirmed the need for children’s, youth and young adult ministries to begin to address or redress the following:

1. *Making true disciples*
2. *Training youth and children as disciple-making disciples*
3. *Bridging spiritual and cultural gaps*

a. Making true disciples of Jesus:

*“So what should be our basic aim in working with young people?
To challenge them with the message of Christ and to nurture them in the way of Christian discipleship”⁷⁹*

To ensure increased longevity and ongoing stability of faith, the literature called for a refocus in our youth and children’s ministry on the *nature* and *nurture* of *Christian discipleship* and *disciple-making*, a return to the import of the Great Commission.

Following the Great Commission in Matthew 28, the call of Jesus to his disciples was to ‘go forth and *make* disciples’. This injunction made to the first disciples to go forward and grow the gospel by ‘making disciples’ is meant to be a paradigm for all disciples who follow. Carson notes here that this disciple making function and priority becomes *“binding on all Jesus’ disciples to make others what they themselves are – disciples of Christ.”⁸⁰*

Likewise, Hull describes the ongoing intention of the Great Commission this way: *“Disciple-making should be installed at the heart of the church, and the commanded product of the church is a fruit-bearing believer called a disciple. Christ’s command to his church to make disciples provides the scriptural mandate”*. This disciple-making mandate includes the call and scriptural obligation to go forth and make ‘fruit bearing’ disciples of children, youth and young adults.⁸¹

Petty describes the outworking of this first principle within youth ministry this way:

“Without any abashment [our] Youth is a ministry of discipleship...The command is to make disciples, by firstly baptizing them, which in the New Testament is almost code for converting them to the faith. Once converted the journey of discipleship continues as we teach teenagers all the things Jesus taught his disciples. There is a direct connection between disciple-making and teaching about Jesus, and no connection whatsoever to entertaining people or providing them with a safe place to hang out. So we aim to produce disciples, whole-hearted disciples in fact, of Jesus”⁸²

Petty believes this emphasis on ‘disciple-making’ ensures a greater likelihood of producing disciples who last. His belief is this disciple-making work is primarily achieved by - *“expecting the word of God to do the work of God”* (Rom 1:16-17) and by youth having the opportunity to *“live out their faith in a community of*

⁷⁹ Christian Youth work: p.21.

⁸⁰ Don Carson: Matthew Commentary: EBC

⁸¹ Bill Hull: The Disciple-Making Pastor (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1988) p.50.

⁸² Petty believes the entertainment model of youth ministry often tries to compete with what the world has to offer, often by just mimicking the best the world has to offer, but this model does not ultimately produce Christian disciples. Petty has developed a ‘discipleship pathway’ for all youth members. From: *‘connect – grow – serve’*. *‘Connecting’* through the 3 program entry points (Sunday youth meeting, Friday bible study & camps) each with an invitation to experience something greater, to *‘grow’*, - through core programs with an invitation to try service, and to *‘serve’* by providing various opportunities to serve the group or wider community. Playbook: p.7 & 11.

positive relationships” where “real Christian life change can be taught and modelled”.⁸³ In other words- “grow whole-hearted disciples of Jesus, through excellent teaching of the scriptures in the context of authentic relationships”.⁸⁴

Moser sums up this discipling-making obligation in ministry best:

*“My aim in youth ministry is to make disciples. It is my plan, purpose, reason, aim, objective, target and task. I am bent on making disciples of Jesus. If I do not do this, I have fallen short of the mark.”*⁸⁵

b. Training our youth and children to become disciple-making disciples:

*“...It’s a call to be biblical in our thinking that all believers are expected to have a ministry. They might never get a staff position in a church, but Jesus’ expectation on **every disciple** is that they too will be an active disciple-maker”*⁸⁶

Following Christ’s command in the Great commission, Jesus’ expectation on every Christian (including children and youth) is they too will become active *disciple-makers*. Hawkins believes our prime mission focus must be to *‘impact the world for Christ by empowering youth to be passionate disciples of Christ’*, this includes the passion to make others what they themselves are i.e. to be ‘disciple making disciples’.⁸⁷

Hawkins is quick to clarify that ‘true discipling’ is not limited to the activity of evangelism alone, or ‘post conversion discipleship’ activities. This presents a false dichotomy of relationship between the two. Rather, true discipleship must encompass ‘both and’ i.e. evangelism, personal discipleship **AND** disciples reproducing themselves by ‘making other disciples’.⁸⁸

Petty, Hawkins, Ashton and Moon all believe that Christian longevity, faith retention and transition across life stages are about having the right theological aim for ministry. Each affirm that the theological (and practical) aim of youth and children’s (indeed all) ministry is not just to *‘bring others to Christ’*, but to ***‘make disciples of all nations’***, and this task is best achieved by ministry *replication* and *multiplication* i.e. by discipling Christians first, and equipping them to reach out to their friends.⁸⁹

The role and function of the ministry leader, their team, and any ministry program is to ‘multiply’ their ministry by equipping youth to be passionate disciples and effective disciple-makers.⁹⁰

⁸³ Following on from the model of the Trinity and the Bible’s emphasis on relationships, Petty believes in the importance of youth building positive and healthy relationships of many kinds. With the belief that God expects his people to live out their faith in a community of positive relationships, and that it is in relationships that life change can be taught & modelled: *“It is clear that God expects his people to live out their faith in a community of positive relationships...As it turns out, it is relationships rather than a drop-in centre that provide a safe place for teenagers. It is relationships that create real fun and protect a group from becoming boring. And it is in relationships through which real Christian life change can be taught and modeled”*. Playbook: p.9.

⁸⁴ Important to note here is that although there’s some intentional 1-1 discipling, Petty’s model is primarily a *group discipleship* ministry, rather than a one-to-one discipleship ministry. Likewise, Tim Hawkins chooses a group discipling method over that of 1-1 discipling. Hawkins calls their small group ministry ‘*Discipleship Teams*’ (D-Teams), giving an emphasis to the core focus of the group. Meeting not primarily to study the Bible, though they do that too, but to *‘grow as disciples and be trained as disciple-makers.’* p.157.

⁸⁵ Changing The World: p. 16.

⁸⁶ Fruit: p.126.

⁸⁷ Fruit: p.92, 126.

⁸⁸ Hawkins defines discipleship as: *‘true discipleship is when a learning and maturing disciple invests his time in someone else’s life, helps them to maturity in Christ; sows God’s word into them; implants in them a passion for ministry, and equips them to go out and make others into disciples of Christ’*. The mark of a trained disciple is their capacity to go and help make a disciple of someone else. In this regard, disciple-making is always *relational*, where the life of one maturing disciple is reproduced in someone else. Fruit: p.97.

⁸⁹ Petty’s philosophy is: *“rather than try capturing random young people by running a program that we think they might find entertaining, we reach out to non-believers through the people already associated with our group...every thing we run is an open opportunity to invite friends along...Although some churches are keen to specify which of their programs are entry points we are happy for our group members to basically invite friends to whichever one they find the easiest to get friends along to...We remind our group members to bring a friend along directly by encouraging them to do just that. We also welcome new friends every Sunday as part of our program, which serves as an ongoing reminder that new friends are always welcome to join us”*. Playbook: p.45.

⁹⁰ Hawkins refers to his particular process as ‘P.E.E.R Witnessing’ (*Pray, Encourage, Evangelise, Recruit*). **Praying** for friends, **encouraging** through acts of Christ-like love, **evangelizing** through the 5 steps of evangelism (tell friends you attend Crossfire group, church & are Christian, tell them one reason you are Christian, ask if they’d like to find out more) and **recruiting** by inviting friends to group & evangelistic events.

In the words of Fields:

*“This style of [replication] ministry becomes a ministry **WITH** students rather than a program-centred ministry **TO** students. Programs don’t develop [disciple-making] relationships; people do.”*⁹¹

In this regard, Hawkins recommends a 3-step strategy for youth leaders in training and equipping youth to engage in the process of learning how to make disciples:⁹²

Youth must be trained in:

1. Bringing friends to Christ
2. Building each other up in Christ
3. Sent out for Christ

It’s critical to note that the disciple-making *purpose* and *priority* is as imperative for children’s ministry as it is for youth, young adult and adult ministry.

In his book – ‘*Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions: Why Children Should be your Church’s #1 Priority*’, Barna lists the importance of the intentional discipleship of children amongst one of his ‘six pillars of Christian formation’ (alongside *worship, evangelism, stewardship, service and community*).⁹³

Barna believes we’re not sufficiently conscientious about the early discipleship process; particularly its need to be a lifelong, *moment-to-moment* process. We should be leading children to develop - a “*habit of continual spiritual growth through prayer, Bible study, service and various spiritual disciplines*”.⁹⁴

Barna also states the responsibility of all Christians to be obedient to the Great Commission of Matt 28 is as imperative for children as it is for adults. Therefore our core responsibility as parents, leaders and churches is to intentionally nurture, equip and encourage children in that one central task.

c. Bridging the ‘gaps’:

In both writing and research - Kinnaman, Fields and Barna all note there exists significant *cultural, relational* and *spiritual formation* ‘gaps’ in our current disciple-making ministry that need bridging if children and youth are to successfully transition across the stages.

This will mean bridging both *spiritual* and *relational* gaps (gaps in wisdom, commitment, transformation and world view) as well as bridging *cultural* gaps (low expectation, cultural contradiction, need for peers and personal disciple-making).

1. Bridging spiritual and relational gaps:

Kinnaman believes there are 3 specific relational and spiritual arenas where particular our disciple-making ‘gaps’ are in evidence:

1. The area of ***relationships*** – gaps in significant intergenerational and parental faith influences⁹⁵
2. The area of ***vocation*** - knowing how to connect and relate vocational choices with faith in Christ⁹⁶

⁹¹ Doug Fields: Purpose Driven Youth Ministry: PWDM (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) p.195.

⁹² Fruit: p.98.

⁹³ Transforming. p.72.

⁹⁴ Transforming: p.73.

⁹⁵ Research found that youth often feel isolated from their parents and feel they are lacking in rich mentoring relationships of other Christian adults. Lost: p29.

⁹⁶ We need to help youth connect spiritual wisdom with real world knowledge, that we make little effort to help disciples connect the dots between their vocation and their faith, not only in the area of science and education etc. but especially so in the creative arena (music, art, film, writing etc.) Lost p.30-31, 52 &127.

3. The area of **wisdom** – gaps in understanding how to pursue [God given] wisdom over information

The following are some thoughts on how some of those spiritual and relational gaps might be bridged:

1:1 Pursuing wisdom over information:

Of particular note here are Kinnaman's reflections on what he views as an *'information-wisdom'* gap in the disciple-making development of our youth. This generation has more access to knowledge content than any other generation in human history, but many lack discernment in how to wisely *apply* that knowledge to their lives and the world.⁹⁷

Kinnaman's research discovered that youth find it difficult to move beyond being mere *consumers of information* to become *people of wisdom*. They may admire the words and works of Jesus (information) but not necessarily *know* him as Lord and God (wisdom). They read and respect the Bible (information) but they do not perceive that it's words lay claim to their *obedience* (wisdom).

What's therefore needed is more than a list of 'dos and don'ts, signing pledges, or completing programs, but a lifetime process of deep *transformation* through faith in Christ, knowledge of God's *Word*, growth in *wisdom* and engaging in rich *community* with other believers.

Transformational discipleship for 'all-of-life wisdom', at every opportunity, is expressed beautifully in the words of Deuteronomy:

*"These commands that I give to 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"*⁹⁸

At this point it's interesting to note the Bible's discipleship approach to children and young adults in this regard. With the young child there's an emphasis on firm *teaching, training, obedience* and *discipline* in the early years of discipleship (Prov. 22:6, 15, Eph. 6:1, Col 3:20). With the young adult there's the specific invitation to grow in - **wisdom**:

*"Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction;
pay attention and gain understanding.
I give you sound learning,
so do not forsake my teaching.
For I too was a son to my father,
still tender, and cherished by my mother.
Then he taught me, and he said to me,
Take hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands, and you will live
Get wisdom, get understanding;
do not forget my words or turn away from them.
Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you;
love her, and she will watch over you"*⁹⁹

Ashton and Moon note that the approach to the young adult is open; various ways lie before the young person on the threshold of adult life. There are rival offers for their allegiance. It may be the company of evil men (Prov. 1:10-19), or the lure of the seductress (Prov. 5:7), but against these Wisdom makes her appeal (Prov. 1:20-30).¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Kinnaman states: "Young adults are digital natives immersed in a glossy pop culture that prefers speed over depth, sex over wholeness, and opinion over truth. But it is not enough for the faith community to run around with our hair on fire, warning about the hazards of cultural entrapment. God's children in the next generation need more and deserve better...they need wisdom...the spiritual, mental and emotional ability to relate rightly to God, to others and to our culture...And true wisdom is rooted in knowing and revering the God who has revealed himself in Christ through the scriptures; Prov 9:10." Lost: p.30.

⁹⁸ Deuteronomy 6:7, cf 4:9.

⁹⁹ Proverbs 4:1-6. This 'invitation to wisdom' is not a call to grow up. It is a call to the completeness and maturity that only God can bring (1Cor 14:12).

¹⁰⁰ Mark Ashton and Phil Moon: *Christian Youth Work* (Bucks: Authentic Media, 2007) p. 36.

The starkness of the choice that lay before the young are abundantly clear: hard work, moral uprightness, discipline, humility, suffering, faithfulness, maturity and discretion are all stressed (Prov. 1:1-33). The *'fear of the Lord'* described here requires costly discipleship, and the scriptures do not shrink back from that reality for adults or for children. The Bible respects young people's aspirations to adulthood and presents the young person with a realistic choice. For those that choose it, the path ahead is far from barren, but gifted, by God, with wisdom and understanding and blessed with abundant life and grace (Prov. 2:3-6, 14:27, 19:23, cf. 1Cor 1:24).¹⁰¹

Ashton and Moon believe this difference in the approach to the discipleship of children and teenagers is a recognition of the increasing independence of adolescents, of the right to make up their own minds, and of their dignity in exercising freedom of choice as beings made in God's image: *"the wisdom literature of the Bible presents the young with the fundamental choices of life and pleads with them to choose correctly"*.¹⁰²

It's important to remember at this point, that part of our own wisdom as parents and gospel ministers is to consider the trajectory of our children's discipleship. To know that God allows us to sometimes feel the consequences of our actions and bad choices as a way of discipline and the learning of wisdom, and we cannot, should not, cloister each other or our children from wisdom's classroom: *"My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in"* (Prov. 3: 11-12).¹⁰³

Our role in the discipleship and disciple-making of children and youth, is to keep pointing them in the direction of God's life-giving, life-promoting, life-guiding wisdom (Prov. 1:8-9, 1Cor 1:18-31) and to pursue God's wisdom ourselves as we seek to do so.

1:2 Building a culture of commitment:

Fields also believes that students today are in desperate need of far more than just information if they're to stay the course as Christian disciples and begin to make disciples of others. Fields belief is that many youth ministries are filled with Bible-literate students who - *bear no fruit*, with all the right 'knowledge' but none of the right daily life choices or costly disciple commitment.¹⁰⁴

Ashton and Moon raise similar concerns about our failure to properly nurture costly Christian commitment in our youth programmes, asking whether in today's evangelism and discipleship we're guilty of asking, not too much but too little of teenagers and so selling them, and God, short:

"We must first teach our young people by example how, having committed their lives to Christ, they can commit their lives to his people – that is, to a few other Christians with whom they learn to share and for whom they learn to care. Having committed their lives to Christ's people, we must teach them (by example again) to commit their lives to Christ's work – that is to one or two non-Christians with whom they determine to share their lives and the gospel.

*Commitment to Christ, commitment to his people, commitment to his work – that is a helpful threefold aim for our ministry with young people. We're not training them to chair committees, plan programmes or organise meetings; we're training them to convert and transform the world"*¹⁰⁵

Field's therefore believes that what's needed today is - a *program-based discipleship plan* to bridge the current 'discipleship commitment gap,' and he proposes the following 3 fold formula for doing so:¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ *Christian Youth Work*. P. 37. (cf. Mk 8: 34-38; Lk 9:23; Jn 12:26).

¹⁰² *Christian Youth Work*. P. 37.

¹⁰³ Cf. Prov. 12:1; 19:20; Ps 94:12

¹⁰⁴ PDYM: p.158.

¹⁰⁵ *Christian Youth Work*. P. 86.

¹⁰⁶ PDYM: p.158.

Church ministries need to intentionally focus on:

- a. Spiritual *education* (through teaching/small groups etc.)
- b. Formation of *independent spiritual habits* through the spiritual disciplines¹⁰⁷
- c. Formation of *significant relational influences* to reinforce discipleship¹⁰⁸

1:3 Aiming for transformation not information:

It's important to recognize that true discipleship and disciple-making is always a *process*, NOT a program. It means young disciples must be *made* or *formed*, not just informed. The discipling/disciple-making process must not be about imparting theological *information*, but about personal, relational and spiritual *formation* and *transformation* (Gal 4:19, Rom 8:29, 12:2-3, 2Cor 3:18, Eph 4:14-15).

This is certainly the 'holistic' intention of Jesus' words to the disciples in the Great Commission, as well as a more 'holistic' approach to dealing with the emotional, spiritual, social and psychological needs of those experiencing transition.

1:4 Building a Biblical worldview not biblical 'stories':

For Barna, the gap likewise exists in the need for ministries to develop greater emphasis on spiritual formation and transformation over mere transference of information.¹⁰⁹ Barna suggests that part of that process is the need (particularly for children's ministries) to begin to foster in the lives of their students a well-developed - *biblical worldview*.

Barna believes churches often lack a clear and focused emphasis on the *spiritual transformation process* of their children, particularly the critical importance of developing, not just Bible knowledge or stories, but a well developed *biblical worldview* from the earliest years of life.

Part of encouraging spiritual 'transformation' beyond just spiritual 'knowledge' is to begin structuring discipleship in ways that help children think biblically, comprehensively, insightfully and practically in regard to the various moral, ethical, relational, financial, political or spiritual situation they find themselves in.¹¹⁰

2. Bridging cultural gaps:

2:1 The culture of low expectation:

The final area that must be bridged in our disciple-making is in countering the '*culture of low expectation*' of youth and young adults.

Cole and Wright in their web piece: '*Why Theology and Youth Ministry Seldom Mix*', believe that one of the problems in youth retention is that society, church and parents alike continue to lower the bar of expectation, particularly in underestimating what youth and young adults are able to theologically

¹⁰⁷ Field's outlines 6 spiritual discipline habits he believes we should make sure our students take with them: 1. Consistent prayer and bible reading 2. Accountable relationships with other Christians 3. Commitment to the body of Christ and church body (not just youth group) 4. To understand and participate in giving/tithing 5. Memorize scripture 6. To be able to study the Bible on their own (beyond reading) PDYM: p.160.

¹⁰⁸ This would include peers, parents, leaders and broader Christian intergenerational influences.

¹⁰⁹ Ivy Beckwith likewise believes that the focus within our children's ministries should never be on entertainment or information download, but the scriptures must be taught towards the development of - '*authentic spiritual formation*'. Instead of a narrow focus on cognitive learning of Bible stories, there must be a primary concentration on '*forming*' children's *relationship* with God, and *nurturing* faithfulness in their total way of life i.e. to "*help children live God's story, not just learn it*". Beckwith believes that to achieve this the Church must operate on a new paradigm, a shift in outcomes as well as methods, a reorientation and expansion of goals for children's education away from the *traditional school model* to a *formational model* of ministry. Ivy Beckwith: *Formational Children's Ministry: Shaping Children using Story, Ritual and Relationship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010). P.18.

¹¹⁰ Barna emphasizes 4 cornerstones that are necessary in a child's spiritual transformation and development of worldview: 1. The Bible: 2.A commanding knowledge of Biblical content: teaching connection between principles and application 3.The identification of organizing principles: 4. A burning desire to obey God: Transforming: p. 67f.

comprehend, thereby increasing the likelihood of shallowness of faith and reducing the likelihood of Christian longevity:

“When we don't expect teens to rise to challenges, we don't teach them doctrine. However, this lack of confidence in teens has left us with an ignorant generation (or several) with regard to what the church actually believes. It is strange that we teach young people complex calculus and physics but don't think they can handle or will be interested in understanding the significance of the Trinity or atonement”¹¹¹

Likewise, Kinnaman's research found evidence that parents and churches have expectations of young adults that are *too low* or driven by *cultural ideas of success*, expecting more from them in terms of school work and achievement etc., than pursuing growth in the Christian faith.

Likewise, there was often a tendency for adults to lower the bar by perceiving mere *attendance* at children's or youth programs, or participation in church 'activities' as an adequate expression of their Childs *Christian* commitment, spiritual engagement or committed discipleship.¹¹²

Interestingly, one pair of Christian college students (Alex and Brett Harris) have instigated a countercultural move, a rebellion (or more accurately – a 'rebelution') against what they perceive as the prevalent low expectations by parents, churches and society of Christian teenagers today.¹¹³

The two authors assert that:

“...when you look around today, in terms of godly character and practical competence, our culture does not expect much of us young people. We're not only expected to do very little that is wise or good, but we're expected to do the opposite. Our media-saturated youth culture is constantly reinforcing lower and lower standards and expectations...ours is not a rebellion against God-established authority, It's a refusal to be defined by our ungodly, rebellious culture...We call it the 'myth of adolescence' and the Rebelution is all about busting that myth”¹¹⁴

Using 1Tim 4:2 as their basis, Alex and Brett Harris believe that: *“as young people we're called to be exemplary in all areas of life. Our generation is falling incredibly short of that calling. Instead of serving as the launching pad of life, the teen years are seen as a vacation from responsibility”*. The site, its books and conferences therefore aim to encourage teens and young adults to strike a countercultural move against these low expectations, and to urge youth to build character and competence by moving out of their teenage 'comfort zones,' and embracing a willingness to *-'get on and do the hard things.'*

¹¹¹ Cole and Wright believe that the vast majority of teens, who call themselves Christians, haven't been well educated in religious doctrine and, therefore, really don't know what they believe. They believe that these results, at least to some degree, reflect the typically shallow theological culture of youth ministry. Cameron Cole and Dave Wright: *'Why Theology and Youth Ministry Seldom Mix'*: (Gospel Coalition Website: April 23rd, 2012) <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/04/23/why-theology-and-youth-ministry-seldom-mix/>. Likewise Kinnaman's American research discovered that overall, knowledge of scripture, doctrine or church history to be poor amongst most young Christians (not just amongst youth but adults in the church as well), With little understanding how faith could be a unifying feature of a life filled with purpose. That for many, the faith they held to was more akin to 'moralistic therapeutic deism', and that many were incapable of reasoning clearly about their faith or willing to take risks for Christ. Anecdotal evidence suggests there is some resonance with that finding within our local setting. Lost: p. 27f, 115, 120.

¹¹² Lost: p. 124.

¹¹³ The term 'rebelution'- combining the words 'rebellion' and 'revolution'. The Rebelution: <http://www.therebelution.com/about/rebelution.htm>

¹¹⁴ The Harris' state: *The Rebelution has really become a type of counter-cultural youth movement among Christian young people from around the country, and even around the world, who are not only rejecting the lies and the corruption of media-saturated youth culture, but they're returning to biblical and historical levels of character and competence...In 1 Timothy 4:12, the Apostle Paul tells Timothy, "Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity." In other words, as young people we are called to be exemplary in all areas of life. Our generation is falling incredibly short of that calling. Instead of serving as the launching pad of life, the teen years are seen as a vacation from responsibility."*

To conclude, if we're to retain our youth through the difficult transitions of teenage life and faith, then it's imperative we address any unhelpful cultural expectations we may have unwittingly reinforced in either our parenting or disciple-making.

2:2 Addressing cultural contradictions:

What is interesting as we reflect on all of the above is the apparent *cultural contradictions* that are at work here; the path to adulthood is less clear than it once was with many of the markers of adulthood happening either much earlier or much later than they used to.

At one level, youth today are the most formally educated of any previous generation, they're growing up faster, reaching puberty earlier, engaging in sexual 'exposure' and 'activity' younger, and experiencing greater social, financial and technological independence than ever before.¹¹⁵

Over the last decade we've also witnessed the evolution of a new - 'pre-teen' life stage (commonly referred to as -'tweens' or 'tween-agers'), aimed at promoting and marketing the early development of younger children into 'mini' adolescents. All this propelling children and teenagers into an early adulthood long before they may be physically, emotionally, socially or psychologically ready.¹¹⁶

Yet, at the same time, the post-teenage years seem to have been locked into a form of *suspended* and *delayed* adult onset, or 'failure to launch', with the period previously referred to as 'youth' having now extended from 18 or 21 - to 29, or even 30 - 35.¹¹⁷

Within this so called -'Peter Pan Generation,' teenagers, young adults and 'adults' are staying longer (or return to) in the parental home, marrying older, starting families later, with all corresponding social and spiritual expectations lowered.¹¹⁸

The *National Children's Bureau* describes this confusing contradiction well:

"Our rites of passage are more fragmented than they used to be: for example, celebrations previously marked 18th and 21st birthdays as key points of entry into adulthood and independence. Leaving home was also a traditional marker of adult independence. Today we have fewer formal and accepted structures for celebrating young people's achievement. Consequently, many young people feel they are receiving mixed messages about their rights and responsibilities from the state and adults around them.

A young person can be married at 16, but can't legally see a film rated for adults; drive at 17, but not vote; and many children and young people 'leave home' many times before they reach adulthood, as a consequence of their parents splitting up, bereavement or going into local

¹¹⁵ See McCrindle Research: 'The First Generation Z's to Graduate High School in 2012': http://mccrindle.com.au/ResearchSummaries/2012/The-First-Generation-Zs-to-Graduate-High-School-in-2012_McCrindle-Research_250112.pdf. And 'Nettle's, Kippers, Twits & Downagers: Understanding the 21st Century Lifestyle Segments': www.mccrindle.com.au/ResearchSummaries/NETTELS-KIPPERS-TWITS-Downagers-Understanding-the-21st-Century-Lifestyle-Segments.pdf. Nicole Brady: 'Puberty Blues: the Trials of Young Girls Growing up Faster than Ever': (SMH: May 22, 2011) <http://www.smh.com.au/national/puberty-blues-the-trials-of-young-girls-growing-up-faster-than-ever-20110521-1ey0j.html>. And C. Ross: Psychology Today: 'Overexposed and Underprepared: The Effects of Early Exposure to Sexual Content': (Aug 13th, 2012) <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/real-healing/201208/overexposed-and-under-prepared-the-effects-early-exposure-sexual-content>.

¹¹⁶ Mommyish: 'The Tween Epidemic: Encouraging Kids to Grow Up Too Fast Since 1997': <http://www.mommyish.com/2011/05/25/childrearing/the-tween-epidemic-encouraging-kids-to-grow-up-too-fast-since-1997>.

¹¹⁷ The Globe and Mail: (10th Feb, 2012) 'Adulthood Delayed for Twentysomethings' <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/the-hot-button/adulthood-delayed-for-twentysomethings/article545227/>
The New York Times: (Aug 18th, 2010) 'What is it about 20-Somethings?' <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/22/magazine/22Adulthood-t.html?pagewanted=all>

¹¹⁸ See section 1.4 in this research paper.
The Daily Mail: (19th July, 2012) 'The Generation Who Refuses to Grow Up' <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2176281/Generation-refuse-grow-No-mortgage-No-marriage-No-children-No-career-plan-Like-30-somethings-Marianne-Power-admits-shes-.html>
The Daily Mail: (15th Oct, 2012) 'Rise of the Peter Pan Generation': <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2217877/Meet-Peter-Pan-generation-Debt-ridden-living-home-lazy-make-bed.html>

*authority care”*¹¹⁹

We must therefore ask ourselves – how might this seemingly contradictory phenomenon (of prolonged youth versus early adulthood) impact, not only our ability to determine clear *expectations*, recognizable ‘rites of passage’ and achievable *goals* for children, teenagers and young adults, but also how we might best approach their *social, emotional, psychological*, and (more significantly) *spiritual* development within this contradictory culture?

2:3 The importance of peers:

In closing the cultural gaps it’s also important to recognize that the influence young people exercise upon one another will be enormous. It’s extremely difficult for youth to hold a set of values that may be radically different from their peers, or to hold onto faith during uncertain times of change or transition. The peer ‘community of faith’ becomes a critical avenue for children and teenagers where they can experience concrete examples of believing to copy and receive caring peer support during times of transition.

We need to ensure our Christian ministries provide an effective environment where counter-cultural changes can be made and supported alongside others working through similar issues within the same demographic culture:

“The Christian peer group has to provide a new environment in which change becomes possible...he is not asked to change alone. He is asked to change together with others. He has examples to copy, and in time he himself becomes an example to others. It involves a process of social interaction.

*Without this we cannot expect young people to live distinctive Christian lives in a world that is so strongly opposed to Christ. They are called to make a heroic stand against the values of that world, but God provides them with brothers and sisters in Christ to support and encourage them in this revolution”*¹²⁰

2:4 Personal disciple-making versus mass production faith development:

To conclude, Kinnaman believes that for the church to bridge the current cultural, relational and spiritual gaps in our youth and children’s ministries we must begin to move away from (what he views as) our - ‘mass production faith development’ approach to ministry, to more *personalized* methods of disciple-making:

“Taking our cues from public education, among other sectors of society, we have created a conveyor belt of development that industrializes the soul formation of young people-who eventually become adults with inch-deep, mile-wide faith. The outcome is adult Christians who were not transformed by their faith as children, as teens, or as young adults. How can we expect more after they turn forty?

*...Some are tempted to believe that spiritual effectiveness is connected to the size of our institutions and the sophistication of our content, but nothing could be further from the truth...does this infrastructure yield more and better discipleship automatically? Our research says no.”*¹²¹

¹¹⁹ ‘Supporting Children and Young People Through Transition’: (National Children’s Bureau: Nov. 2005)
http://www.citized.info/pdf/external/ncb/179_OMGQL_Transition_Briefing_final.pdf

¹²⁰ *Christian Youth Work*. P. 81.

¹²¹ Lost: p. 121.

Kinnaman believes the church has unhelpfully embraced an *industrialized, mass-production, public-education approach* to faith development, creating a 'conveyor belt' of development that industrializes the soul formation of young people, who eventually become adults with inch-deep, mile-wide faith. The outcome is adult Christians who were not transformed by their faith as children, as teens, as young adults.

Kinnaman compares this modern approach to Jesus' work with his disciples, which was characterized by *life-on-life mentoring and apprenticeship*:

*"...Caring about the faith journeys of young adults...there's a growing sense that we need new ways of discipleship, a new way of teaching, instructing, engaging, and developing the lives of young people. We need a new mind to focus on apprenticeship in the way of Jesus"*¹²²

He therefore suggests there's now a new need to focus more on going - *deeper with a few*, than - *superficially with many*.¹²³

2:4 Parental Partnership is Key:

*"If parents let only the church teach the children about God then their children will not see a connection between church and real life"*¹²⁴

*"It's important that all youth ministers gain a big picture perspective regarding the vital connection between youth and family...I've come to realize that I can have little long-lasting influence on a student's life if the parents aren't connected to the same spiritual transformation process that we're teaching at church"*¹²⁵

Literature, data research and Field Questionnaires all indicated significant concerns regarding the relationship and priority between church and family in regard to the spiritual nurture of children and teenagers. All sources suggested that parental support, engagement and active involvement in their child's spiritual nurture was critical to youth retaining faith through life's transitions.

Most literature came to very similar conclusions as to what were determined as 'best practice' principles in this regard. The research affirmed the following:

a. Parents responsibility and influence:

All sources agree that the *primary* training ground for the discipleship and spiritual formation of children is within the Christian family rather than the local church. Scriptures teach that the core responsibility for raising children in the Lord belongs to families, and that fathers must take particular leadership (Gen 18:19, Deut 6:4-7, Prov 1:1-9, Eph 6:1-4, Col 3:20, 2Tim 1:5). In this regard youth and children's ministers (and their ministries) must be careful not to usurp that primary role.

Powell and Clark believe it's not just a matter of *who* might carry prime responsibility, that despite changing cultural trends and divergent avenues of influence, it's *parents* who still influence the faith of children more than anyone, or anything, else.¹²⁶

¹²² Lost: p.35. Ashton & Moon suggest this is particularly so in relation to conversion and follow up. Ashton & Moon believe that youth respond differently to adults and therefore have different needs in discipleship, that there's often an overemphasis on 'crusade style big events' as a successful method of evangelism or a call to conversion that does not often recognize the differences in youth evangelism from adult evangelism. There can often be large 'responses' made at youth rallies that may not always reflect genuine conversions. Youth need more time to 'grow into conversion' as a gradual process than the typical adult might. What is needed is adequate youth discipleship and follow-up, ideally through long-term personal relationship investment and community group contact. Christian Youth Work: p. 84.

¹²³ Lost: p.121, 124.

¹²⁴ Larry Fowler: Rock-Solid Kids: *Giving Children a Biblical Foundation for Life*: (Ventura: Gospel Light, 2004) p.10.

¹²⁵ Doug Fields: *Your First Two Years in Youth Ministry: a Personal and Practical Guide to Starting Right*: (El Cajon: Zondervan, 2002) p.104.

¹²⁶ Sticky Faith: p.21. In their research, participants were asked to rank five groups in terms of the quality and quantity of support received (friends inside youth group, friends outside, youth leaders, parents, adults in the congregation). The number one ranking was 'parents' p.23.

*"They were probably the biggest influence. And I know that if my parents hadn't shown me through example what it was to be a Christian, I probably would have had a very difficult time doing it"*¹²⁷

Their research discovered that more important than asking children spiritual questions, was the way parents expressed and lived out *their own faith* before their children: *"more than even your support, it's who you are that shapes your kid"*.¹²⁸

*"Where did we go wrong? We never shared what WE had learned in church. We were interviewing our kids instead of having a mutual conversation with them. Now when we ask our kids to share about what they learned in church, we talk about what we learned too"*¹²⁹

*"The best discussions about faith happen when parents don't just ask questions, but also share their own experiences...in other words, parents shouldn't merely interview their kids; they need to discuss their own faith journeys, including both ups and downs"*¹³⁰

The research also indicated that a parent's role is particularly to help children learn to *trust* God, and to understand that true faith is not all about 'doing' but primarily about *faith* in Christ and obedience as a *response* to that trust (Gal 5:6, Jn 6:28-29). This can be demonstrated as parents proceed to live out and model their own faith and unswerving trust in God amidst all the disappointments, discouragements, changes and challenges of life:

*"The greatest gift you can give your children is to let them see you struggle and wrestle with how to live a lifetime of trust in God...as you faithfully hold on to the God who has taken hold of you, the life you live and model will be a beacon of hope and direction that no sin management faith can hope to achieve. As you trust the gospel, and the Lord who saves, your Sticky Faith will help your children discover their own Sticky Faith"*¹³¹

Modelling this kind of 'mature' faith helps children, not only understand and 'see' that process in action, but they also come to understand that growth and transformation in Christ for everyone, is a process. In helping their children gain a concrete image and experience of God's love, there's a need for parents to model to their children an *unconditional, non-judgmental, ever-embracing* love across the challenging circumstances of life.¹³²

Important to note here, is the scriptures also describe the *church community* as a 'family', the 'family of families' (e.g. 1Tim 3:15; 5:1-2). Parents must therefore aim, not just to see their children become fully mature adults in their own right, but to see them grow into maturity *in Christ* and become fully formed adult members of the church, not remain as spiritually (or emotionally) dependent children.

b. Current misalignment:

What's increasingly recognized across the research is although most parents realize they carry primary responsibility for their child's spiritual development and nurture, this responsibility to proactively nurture is not always happening (see section 1.4).¹³³

¹²⁷ Sticky Faith: *Youth Worker Edition*: p.115.

¹²⁸ Sticky Faith: p.24f & 184f. The authors note that even the best of spiritual parenting models may not always secure a child's ongoing faith, that ultimately it is the Holy Spirit, not us, that develops sticky faith in any individual p.28.

¹²⁹ Sticky Faith: *Youth Worker Edition*, p. 124

¹³⁰ Sticky Faith: *Youth Worker Edition*, p.118

¹³¹ Sticky Faith: p. 46-47.

¹³² Sticky Faith: p.37.

¹³³ See section 3.4: '*Christian parents increasingly outsourcing spiritual instruction to the church*': in the first half of this research paper.

The missing ingredient in the discipleship of children today appears to be the family. As a result the church has increasingly begun to operate as the *primary* means of spiritual development of youth and children, as parents have begun to relinquish or 'outsource' that role.

Larry Fowler in his book – *'Rock Solid Kids: Giving Children a Biblical Foundation for Life'*, describes the current, and not altogether un-common, parent-church dynamic this way:

*"Together, parents and churches have settled into a destructive codependent relationship. Parents, with little inclination and few high quality resources to devote to the spiritual nurture of their children, have largely abdicated the job to the church. And the church had readily taken on a task that was originally mandated in Scripture to the parents of children."*¹³⁴

Stanton believes this particular dynamic has often then resulted in an unhelpful self-perpetuating cycle:¹³⁵

"Where we are is a self-perpetuating cycle: the discipling of young people has been handed over to professionals. Because the professionals are doing the work, parents no longer exercise their responsibility, and as a result they are inexperienced and ill equipped to fulfill their responsibility. And because they are ill equipped, parents seek more professionals to take care of the situation for them.

*And around we go...It sounds to me like the spiritual equivalent of the 'eating out' lifestyle? Where cafes and restaurants are full but our apartments no longer have kitchens? As our society is rediscovering the value of a home-cooked meal perhaps the church needs to rediscover the value of a home-discipled young person?"*¹³⁶

Research indicated that this apparent 'abdication' of spiritual responsibility exists in different forms, and for varying reasons.

For example:

For some, abdication may take the form of a lack of *interest, understanding* or *engagement* in how the church might be nurturing their children, or failure to make personal appraisal of the effectiveness of those programs in doing so:

"Honestly, for many [parents] the kids ministry is just seen as babysitting, though for those of us doing it, we see it as Church for kids, a place to learn and grow, and worship God together in a way they understand" - Children's Minister: Sydney

"Generally, my vibe from other youth leaders is that parents are not really interested in our program and methodology. Many of our parents don't even know the names of our youth leaders" - Youth Minister: Sydney

"In the past we sent out newsletters covering youth issues and even ran seminars. But we stopped the seminars because they were so poorly attended even though the speakers were of a high standard, and the seminars ran at the same time as the kids were in their groups (i.e. about as easy as possible)" - Youth Minister: Sydney

¹³⁴ Larry Fowler: *Rock-Solid Kids: Giving Children a Biblical Foundation for Life*: (Ventura: Gospel Light, 2004) p.7.

¹³⁵ Timothy P. Jones: *Perspectives on family Ministry: 3 Views*: (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009) p.16., Jones references a Nationwide Barna Study conducted in 2003 indicating parents had largely given over the responsibility for the spiritual nurture and development of their children to the church, a responsibility that was impossible for the church to achieve alone - *"Unfortunately no matter how hard the church tries, it's incapable of bringing a child to complete spiritual maturity: that is the job of the family. The more willing churches are to play the co-dependent role in this drama, the less likely we are to see spiritually healthy families and a generation of young people who grow into mature believers"* (Parents Accept Responsibility for their Child's Spiritual Development but Struggle with Effectiveness) <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/120-parents-accept-responsibility-for-their-childs-spiritual-development-but-struggle-with-effectiveness>

¹³⁶ G. Stanton: *'Fast food youth Ministry'* (Sydney Anglican Website: March 8th: 2010).

For others, abdication may present itself as an overly simplistic parenting approach to the process of spiritual nurture:

*“The relatively small group of parents who do talk with their kids about faith tend to default to asking: ‘what did you talk about in church today?’...‘how was youth group?’...‘what did you think of the sermon?’”*¹³⁷

Yet for others, their abdication has come about through sheer lack of confidence or know-how:¹³⁸

“The place where we most feel inadequate is the spiritual leadership of our kids, for most of us it wasn’t modelled and we don’t know what that looks like...how do you spiritually lead? And we hope someone else can do it. So when you show up at a church that employs a kids minister or sets up a ministry where there’s qualified Sunday School teachers or kids leaders, you’re desperately hoping they know more than you do”- Bruce Linton: Children’s Minister

One particular Barna study echoes Linton’s assessment:

*“The survey data indicate that parents generally rely upon their church to do all of the religious training their children will receive. Parents are not so much unwilling to provide more substantive training to their children, as they are ill equipped to do such work. According to the research, parents typically have no plan for the spiritual development of their children; do not consider it a priority, or have little or no training in how to nurture a child’s faith”*¹³⁹

Fowler believes one answer to that particular concern is rather than embracing the church as another "service provider", the biblical mandate is that the church re-enforce that the home continue to be the primary discipleship environment for children. Fowler agrees that many parents are, or feel, inadequate for the task, and therefore the responsibility of the 'community/church' should be to *augment* that training by equipping and teaching both *parents* and *children* alike.

Timothy Paul Jones proposes a similar solution, believing that if parents have failed to prioritize their time to disciple children in the home, then churches have failed to train parents so to be "equipped" for the task. Jones provides a helpful schematic that unites these two God-ordained institutions whereby church leaders reorient existing ministries to help parent’s disciple their children.

Jones writes,

*“The church provides a context where parents are equipped to train their children in God’s ways, where children learn to live their faith in a larger community and through which believers are sent share the gospel throughout the world. Parents disciple and train their children in ways that guide their children toward the gospel and leverage their children’s lives for the sake of Christ’s kingdom”*¹⁴⁰

Similarly, Fowler believes the Church can easily offer greater assistance to parents by:

1. Encouraging parents to have a *systematic* approach to training their children
2. Providing *take home materials* for parents to use with their children
3. Developing a ‘training in the home’ *support network* for parents
4. Providing parents with opportunities to *observe teachers* in *conversational instruction* to children
5. Using curriculums that have *long term plans* in teaching the Bible to children

¹³⁷ Sticky Faith: p. 72.

¹³⁸ See section 3.4: ‘Christian parents increasingly outsourcing spiritual instruction to the church’: in the first half of this research paper.

¹³⁹ George Barna: ‘Parents Accept Responsibility for their Child’s Spiritual Development, but Struggle with Effectiveness’: <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/120-parents-accept-responsibility-for-their-childs-spiritual-development-but-struggle-with-effectiveness>

¹⁴⁰ Jones: Family Ministry Field Guide, p. 114. Note that Jones’s “family equipping” model outlined in the appendix is developed from this theory.

Fowler believes that *'discipling children' and 'discipling parents to disciple children'* should become the necessary components of every local church ministry.¹⁴¹

Lastly, the church can re-enforce and support their commitment to parental responsibility by de-cluttering the calendar so parents have more time to do just that:

*"When ministry calendars become too crowded, weekly Bible studies, committee meetings, and youth groups compete with seasonal activities and monthly events. Eventually, families become so busy doing church that no time remains for them to be the church in their homes and communities. If your church is planning for parents to disciple children, your ministry may need to do less so that parents have time to do more"*¹⁴²

c. A partnership:

*"What can we do to work together? In nine years of working in a church, I don't think I ever asked that question. I told a few parents what they should do and I told them what I was doing but I didn't ask what can we do?"*¹⁴³

The research affirmed that in order to turn the current misalignment around, their needs to be a genuine *partnership* formed between parents and those church ministries that share responsibility for the teaching, discipling and spiritual nurture of children and youth. This genuine partnership will require a realignment in spiritual responsibility, with the church existing to *'serve, support and supplement'* the role of parents, as well as the need to put intentional discipling processes in place, based upon commonly agreed goals, strategies and shared information.

*"Our philosophy is that we are 'facilitators' in the Christian growth and education of children with parents playing the 'primary' role. It's a partnership. Our role is trying to be strategic in supporting parents in their role, and then genuinely treating kids as members of the kingdom. The challenge is to teach in such a way that deflects away from the leaders, and towards the family. In the end I think you get a healthier family dynamic, a healthier church dynamic and kids that understand what it means to love Jesus"*¹⁴⁴

One research study indicated that not only was the resumption and realignment of parental responsibility alongside the church critical in achieving optimal spiritual nurture of children, but a secondary 'spin-off' in the development of greater parent-church partnership was an increase in the likelihood of stronger Christian maturity and greater longevity in the faith of children and teenagers:

*"Ministries having the greatest success at seeing young people emerge into mature Christians, rather than contented church-goers, are those that facilitate a parent-church partnership focused on instilling specific spiritual beliefs and practices in a child's life from a very early age. Sadly, less than one out of every five churches has produced such a ministry"*¹⁴⁵

Reggie Joiner, of *'Think Orange' Ministries*, believes that: "what we should really be concerned about is our *'collective' ability to influence a generation to have a stronger, deeper, and more authentic relationship with God*", that kids need parents who will help them advance their relationship with God, and parents need churches that will help them know how to be spiritual leaders.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ Rock Solid: p.10.

¹⁴² Family Ministry Field Guide, p. 105.

¹⁴³ Jon Thorpe: *'Raising our Youth: Who's Job is it anyway?'* (Growing Faith Website: Feb. 13th, 2012).

¹⁴⁴ Bruce Linton: Children's Minister: Sydney.

¹⁴⁵ *'Spiritual Progress Hard to Find'*: Barna Research (December 22nd, 2003)

<http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/132-spiritual-progress-hard-to-find-in-2003>

¹⁴⁶ *'Think Orange'* ('Orange-ology') arises from the conviction that the Church is not doing family ministry well, and families themselves are struggling to raise children under the pressures of modern society. Joiner calls for the church and family to join *'partnership'* in the task of growing children & teenagers

But Joiner believes the problem is we've so divorced the ministry of parents and the church, not only do we no longer know *how* to form a combined partnership, but we also have *non-existent, undeveloped or ineffective* models of 'family ministry':

*"We don't really know how to partner with parents...[the church] believe that parents probably won't assume responsibility for their own children's spiritual growth, so they have tried to become a parent substitute"*¹⁴⁷

*"There is a difference between doing something 'for' the family and doing something 'with' the family. Most churches are characterized by random acts of ministry to the family...Family ministry should not be another program you add to your list of programs. It should be the filter you use to create and evaluate what you do to influence children and teenagers"*¹⁴⁸

Joiner and his 'Think Orange' team have attempted to rectify the parent-church disconnect by developing a process called 'strategy integration', synchronizing everything across the church under *one ministry team* called - 'Family Ministry'. This team has oversight of everything relating to children through to young adults, as well as driving the master plan for partnering with parents (i.e. aligning ministry leaders and parents with the same end in mind).¹⁴⁹

The aim is to engage parents in an integrated strategy, synchronizing the home and church around a clear message, recruiting mentors to become partners with families, and to mobilize the next generation to be the church. To this end, Joiner still uses a traditional, didactic, pedagogic model of ministry, with traditional *age-segregated peer group* programming.¹⁵⁰

Below are the 5 essential integration practices in the 'Orange' family ministry methodology:

1. *Integrating strategy across the church*: avoiding creating competing programmes and creating an integrated strategy from '*birth to graduation*' (synchronising team, common language, strategic programs, relationships etc.)
2. *Refining the bible message and amplifying what's important*
3. *Reactivating the family*: helping parents actively participate in the spiritual formation of their children. Providing initiatives across the curriculum for parents and families to complete at home, provide resources focusing on family time, hosting family events, forums etc. Working alongside parents across the spectrum of parental engagement with the church
4. *Elevating Community*: every child is connected to a leader, addressing the need for 'multiple voices' in their life¹⁵¹

spiritually, and thereby greater strengthening the family unit. The concept of 'Orange' is the combining of '*red*' (representing families, the heart and soul of society, where love, acceptance, sacrifice and relationships are primarily learnt)) and '*yellow*' (representing the Church called to shine the light of Christ) with the belief that God has created the Church and the family for specific purposes, but the effects of each are multiplied when combined together (i.e. not either/or but both/and). When the mix of red and yellow is right = orange. The two combined influences, of church and home, make greater impact than the 2 influences operating separately. R. Joiner: '*Think Orange: Imagine the Impact when Church and Family Collide...*' (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook Publisher, 2009) p.165.

¹⁴⁷ Orange: p.89.

¹⁴⁸ Orange: p.83.

¹⁴⁹ Joiner believes that true family ministry is not about programs but rather, an effort to synchronize church leaders *and* parents *around a master plan* to build faith and character in their sons and daughters. Family ministries should develop the process that drives how both the church *and* the home combine their efforts to influence the next generation. Orange: p.83.

¹⁵⁰ Orange: p.83.

¹⁵¹ Joiner is a strong believer in the importance and significance of Christian community in shaping the lives and growth of believers of all ages and stages. Joiner firmly believes that children (especially teenagers) need adult voices, coaches, leaders, mentors in their lives who will say things a Christian parent would say. It takes multiple influences to guard the faith of a generation, therefore parents need to widen the circle of influence for the sake their children's spiritual, relational and emotional growth. Joiner also believes that children, teenagers and young adults also need a consistent group of peer relationships. Orange: p.73.

5. *Leveraging Influence*: creating opportunities for students to experience personal ministry and serving

Similarly, Doug Fields in his book – *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry: 9 Essential Foundations for Healthy Growth* (PDYM) believes, that not only have we failed to adequately partner with parents, but we've also failed to develop true models of *family ministry*:

*"I was intimidated by parents of teenagers. Although unspoken, I felt an element of competition for students' time. I didn't view parents as partners, but as enemies who slowed down my plans to produce disciples...[but] Youth workers are becoming increasingly aware that a student-only youth ministry is less effective than a family-friendly youth ministry. Because we rarely see students in their family context, we often underestimate the power of the family"*¹⁵²

Fields notes that today's youth have only been exposed to *age-segregated* youth ministry, and believes youth are healthier when ministered to with their *whole family*, youth ministries that choose to exclude parents become less effective. He believes in order to more helpfully minister to youth over the long haul it's therefore critical that current churches intentionally develop a ministry to *entire families*.¹⁵³

In Field's particular *family ministry* model, he promotes taking intentional steps for the youth ministry to become more involved in family life, merging a more thorough going integration of youth ministry, church and family than many of the current 'family' models do.¹⁵⁴

In this regard, PDYM developed a series of progressive steps to build a stronger family focus:

1. *Creating a teamwork mentality*: developing strong ties and relationships between families, youth staff and the church.
2. *Clear communication*: regularly communicating youth information and updating parents
3. *Family resourcing*: making books, videos available to parents, parent input nights etc.
4. *Peer family learning*: using other experienced parents to help give peer input and support to other parents
5. *Designing family programs*: deciding what parts of the youth program might be converted into a 'family program'
6. *Adding parents to volunteer teams*: bringing parents on to some of the youth leadership teams
7. *Offering parents a spiritual life plan*: working with individual parents to see how they might work together on a spiritual growth plan for their teenager using the same structure as the Saddleback '5' program

Fields also believes that part of developing a partnering process for churches with youth and children's ministries is learning to think differently about the '*bigger picture*'. He suggests the following:¹⁵⁵

* Change thinking of parents as *the enemy* - to parents as *partners*

* From thinking 'my' ministry program to, '*how will this activity impact the families in church*'?

¹⁵² PDYM: p.253 & 251.

¹⁵³ PDYM: p.253.

¹⁵⁴ PDYM: p.252.

¹⁵⁵ Doug Fields: *Your First Two Years in Youth Ministry: a Personal and Practical Guide to Starting Right!*: (El Cajon: Zondervan, 2002) p.85.

- * Reducing the number of youth group weeks and encouraging youth to *spend real time* at home with their families in those weeks
- * *Communicate clearly* with parents: keep them informed
- * Offer lots of help, input and support but don't *teach parents how to parent teenagers* unless you've had teenagers yourself
- * Take time to develop a few strong relationships with *key parents* as a priority
- * Reach out to *disconnected* parents
- * *Allow parents to minister to parents*: have a volunteer parent organize family-friendly events and training times for their peers

Jon Thorpe, of Anglican Youthworks, underlines the importance of ministries actively reaching out to parents and building cooperation and communication in a working partnership between parents and the youth/children's ministry. Thorpe believes the most important thing is to change this outsourcing culture in our churches and recognize that parents and the youth ministry have a common goal and responsibility to see young people grow into mature disciples of Jesus.¹⁵⁶

He makes the following practical suggestions for getting such a partnership started:

- Commit to meeting regularly with the parents to keep the conversation going. Perhaps once at the beginning of the year and once in the middle¹⁵⁷
- Invite parents to call the youth ministry if they need some pastoral support for their teenager
- If your parents have expressed their commitment to working together then take up that commitment and give them a call when you need help or prayer
- Send a newsletter home each term so parents know what has been happening in the youth ministry - what they have been talking about in the bible, what has been encouraging or discouraging, what is coming up. This gives the parents an opportunity to follow up with you or their children, it allows them to encourage their children to be involved, and it allows them to pray specifically for the ministry
- Connect parents with articles and resources that would be helpful
- Stand up in the services and share what has been happening in the youth ministry
- Introduce the leaders in the services so people can have some idea of what is happening and pray for their leadership
- Invite parents to help out with camp
- Encourage leaders to go and talk to the parents at church
- Invite parents to a youth group night

¹⁵⁶ 'Raising our Youth: Who's Job is it anyway?'

¹⁵⁷ Thorpe notes here, that these meetings often have very little lasting impact because we fail to follow up with any meaningful concrete action. The most important outcome is improving the way you communicate with parents but there are things you can actively do to help. You need to come up with a plan. From everything you talked about, what are you *actually* going to do? And equally important, what are you *not* going to do? Whatever the plan, it must be achievable and sustainable and that means sometimes saying no to good ideas. You then need to communicate that plan to the parents and the church. 'Raising our Youth: Who's Job is it anyway?'

Lastly, in his book –*Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, Barna suggests as well as taking leadership into the home, effective children’s ministries are those that insist on regular participation of parents in the children’s program, with an expectation they invest a minimum number of days or hours into this ministry, based upon their particular skills or gifts.

Barna believes the most effective children’s ministries will also endeavour to provide weekly *support materials* to help parents build on the teaching their children receive at church.¹⁵⁸ He also suggests there’s significant value in considering offering ‘*parent- teacher conferences*’ to formalize dialogue between home and church, to identify obstacles to spiritual growth, and inform parents of church curriculum purpose and direction.¹⁵⁹

Note: It’s important to note here that much of the literature acknowledges that a partnership between churches and *non-Christian* parents is also necessary, but the nature and practice of that partnership would require a slightly different approach and engagement.¹⁶⁰

(It’s also important to note that it’s very difficult to get a unanimously held definition of ‘family ministry’, nor is there a commonly agreed upon theological or practical methodology of approach. For further reflection on this particular issue read – ‘*Perspectives on Family Ministry: 3 Views*’ in the appendix section of this paper for further examples of different models and perspectives of ‘family ministry’).

2:5 Intergenerational (as opposed to multigenerational) Relationships needed:¹⁶¹

“Build ‘social capital’ into your child’s life, creating a network of caring believers who will pray for, mentor, and bless your children with their presence over the course of their lives”¹⁶²

“In a culture that has severed ties between the generations, we need to include meaningful and intentional co-mingling of the generations at church”¹⁶³

“I knew we were starting to get somewhere when my six-year-old son was rattling off who he wanted at his birthday party. There were as many adults as kids on that list”¹⁶⁴

An assumption held by most of the research material was, now more than ever, the generations need one another. Alongside surrendering discipleship to professional ministers, church programs have become so radically age segregated that there’s now little *intergenerational contact* or broad *disciple-making interaction* within the faith community.

All sources were clear in their conclusion that strong ‘*intergenerational disciple-making relationships*’ were critical to youth maturity, faith development and Christian retention and longevity across all life stages.

¹⁵⁸ An example of how one church does this is - Dallas Bible Church, they provide a free monthly digital resource magazine to help parents with creative ideas to engage with their children over the months lessons. <http://www.dallasbible.truepath.com/childrens-ministry/your-childs-curriculum/parent-resources/>

¹⁵⁹ *Transforming*: p.111. Cosby also believes that it’s important that partnering with parents should not simply stop at communicating but also engaging them in participating or observing at some level within the youth ministry. *Giving up the Gimmicks*: p.17.

¹⁶⁰ Stanton believes that believes that the responsibility and accountability is the same for unbelievers as well as believers and therefore every effort should be made to build relationships with these parents & invite them along to information nights etc. Graham Stanton (Zac Veron (Ed): *Youth Ministry on the Front Foot*: (South Sydney: Anglican Youthworks, 2012) p.251.

¹⁶¹ The distinction made here, is that by ‘intergenerational’ we mean an ‘*intentional proactive engagement* and *disciple-makin nurture*’ across generations, as opposed to the concept of ‘multigenerational’ which is the co-existence of various generations alongside each other without there necessarily being any pursuit of intentional ministry to one another or with one another.

¹⁶² *Sticky Faith*: p.59.

¹⁶³ *Perspectives*: p.49.

¹⁶⁴ *Intergenerational Ministry Beyond The Rhetoric*: B.M Griffin & B. Snailum (Fuller Youth Website) <http://stickyfaith.org/articles/intergenerational-ministry-beyond-the-rhetoric>

a. A generation gap:

Research suggested that although there are benefits and necessities in targeted age segregation for the nurture and discipleship of children and youth (just as partnering with parents is critical for optimal growth and spiritual maturity), so too is the vital necessity for some kind of regular, consistent and *intentional intergenerational engagement* with other Christian adults.¹⁶⁵

*“The assumption that only the young can reach the young must be questioned...The popular concept is that young people are best served by enjoying virtually exclusive contact with their peers while at church needs rethinking. The effective isolation of children and young people into peer groups means that their identity ends up being significantly shaped by the peer group...by encouraging minimal or insignificant contact with mature adults, there is the distinct possibility that young people will not grow up as quickly as they could or should...exposure to the life and gatherings of the rest of the church is essential, not optional”*¹⁶⁶

*“We have to be sure that we don't segregate the youth for our sake and theirs. They are part of the body of Christ too, and no part of the body can remain healthy if one of its members is cut off and put to the side. If we segregate the youth, not only do we lose all they have to teach us, but we also inadvertently teach them that the church is really only for adults - those who are married and have families of their own. And then we wonder why they don't get involved in church as college students or young singles, when in reality, we've been telling them all along that the church isn't yet for them”*¹⁶⁷

Likewise, Joiner:

*“A mother and father are not the only adult influences my children need”*¹⁶⁸

Joiner firmly believes in the importance and significance of the **Christian community** in shaping the lives and growth of believers of all ages and stages. Joiner believes that children (especially teenagers) need other adult *voices, coaches, leaders, mentors* in their lives who will say things a Christian parent would say. What has become clear is that it takes *multiple* influences to guard the faith of a generation, therefore parents and churches need to be widening *the circle of influence* for the sake of children's spiritual, relational and emotional growth.¹⁶⁹

Both the Francis and Richter study and the Barna research (c.f. point 1.6 in this paper) found an important factor in mitigating youth drop out rates was not continually *segregating* kids from adults in church, but intentionally creating opportunities that allow them to see adults *practising their faith*.

(Interestingly, they also discovered that intergenerational contact and engagement for youth and children with those *younger* than themselves was also very important in faith development and longevity. Research suggested that students who *serve* and *build relationships* with younger children were also more likely to hang on to their faith).¹⁷⁰

Similarly, *'Sticky Faith'* argued kids today have lost **'social capital'**, in they're missing a handful of adults who care and are willing to pour themselves into their lives without a self-serving agenda. Sticky Faith

¹⁶⁵ Interesting to note here is the intentional 'intergenerational' nature of 'disciple-making' we find depicted in both the old and the new testaments. For example: Gen 18:19, Deut 6:4-9, 11:18-21, Prov 22:6, Eph 6:4, 2 Tim 1:5, 3:14-15. The church is intended to have multigenerational fellowship for older members to take responsibility for the spiritual nurture of the young, and for the young to encourage the old.

¹⁶⁶ FAQs: p.19.

¹⁶⁷ *'Youth need the church and the church need youth'*: Mark Howard (Gospel Coalition Website: April 30th 2012). <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tqc/2012/04/30/youth-need-the-church-and-the-church-needs-youth/>

¹⁶⁸ Orange: p.44.

¹⁶⁹ Joiner also believes that children teenagers and young adults need not only the solid Christian influence of parents, leaders, coaches and mentors but also a consistent group of solid peer relationships. Orange: p.73.

¹⁷⁰ Sticky Faith: p.98.

argues, in a number of different ways, that meaningful *'intergenerational relationships'* are essential to a child's longevity in the church and overall spiritual vitality.¹⁷¹

Notably, corresponding research indicated it's not only youth feeling the generation gap, but the 'twentysomething' group also felt isolated from parents and other older adults in the realm of faith and spirituality.

Many twentysomethings felt older adults don't understand their doubts or concerns, and the majority of these young people reported never having an adult *friend* other than their parents.¹⁷² This age group in particular appears to relish, not only diversity of ideas but also diversity of relationships, and there's a yearning to both be mentored on one hand, yet also have the freedom, independence and scope to make it on their own.¹⁷³

In response to this research, Clark and Powell have suggested what's now needed is a new *5:1 ratio* i.e. instead of 1 leader for every 5 kids or teenagers, we need to be thinking: "*5 adults to every 1 kid, adults of all ages whom we recruit to invest in each child in little, medium or big ways, building a 'sticky web of relationships' for our children.*"¹⁷⁴

Nieuwhof reiterates the need for more adult contact, interaction and concern in her article - "*Why Your Kids Need Five Other Adults in Their Lives*", stating: "*I dream of a culture in which every child has five adults, other than their parents, they can talk to about the important stuff. Like school. And girls. And parents. And the future. And God. And faith. And their problems....*"¹⁷⁵

Where each child, each teen, each young adult has access to at least:

- * Five people who know their hopes and dreams
- * Five people who know their quirks and good points
- * Five people they can talk to honestly about what's really going on in their lives
- * Five people who can offer wisdom when life gets confusing
- * Five people who care about them and pray for them

Nieuwhof suggests it should be possible to secure at least five Christian, committed and reliable adults from amongst our small groups, family friends, coaches and extended family, with whom a child can build a trusting relationship, that might be willing to spend one-on-one time with that child periodically.

She concludes by extending to readers this challenge and this vision:¹⁷⁶

"My question is simple: who are your kids' five? Who will they text and who will they call when they don't know what to do?... If every child and teen ends up with five adults on their phone's favorite list, we might indeed be raising a wider, more secure, more grounded, more Christ-centered, more joyful generation than we've seen in a long time...."

If you're still not convinced, I have a simple question. Don't you wish there had been five other

¹⁷¹ Sticky Faith: p.98f. Powell & Clark note, that with the advent of Facebook, Skype and other new technologies, even distance need not be a barrier to building a sticky web across an 'extended' family. See also *Sticky Faith: Youth Worker Edition*, for more ideas on the 5:1 ratio. P84 & 85, 89,91f.

¹⁷² Lost: p.29.

¹⁷³ Kinnaman refers to this dual desire as the 'me-and-we' contradiction. Lost: p.29.

¹⁷⁴ Sticky Faith: p.98.

¹⁷⁵ Carey Nieuwhof: '*Why Your Kids Need Five Other Adults in Their Lives*': (Orange Parents Website: Oct 4th, 2013) <http://orangeparents.org/why-your-kids-need-five-other-adults-in-their-lives/>

¹⁷⁶ Nieuwhof: '*Why Your Kids Need Five Other Adults in Their Lives*'.

adults in your life growing up that you had a great relationship with, trusted, and could talk to?"

b. Changing the old approach:

"Some leaders have attempted to build a bridge for this disconnection by developing another church service. But even if this attracts hundreds of college-age people, it doesn't necessarily solve the core problem. In fact, from a college-aged person's perspective, this approach could contribute to further disconnection. This model actually exposes all the differences between people, not the similarities. In order for true connection to take place we have to have another approach, a lasting one"¹⁷⁷

"I wish that more youth ministry was aimed at connecting students to the broader life of the church than simply having thrilling activities targeted at their generational desires. If students had greater connections to an intergenerational church ministry, their transition into college would be more widely guided and followed by others. This would help students to view their spiritual lives as less individualistic and more community-oriented. They would see that their spirituality is not about them alone, but about finding their place within the body of Christ"¹⁷⁸

Like many others, Kinnaman believes the lack of consistent, intentional intergenerational engagement is a significant gap in the current *disciple-making process*; in order to bridge this gap a radically new approach is needed in the way we structure and develop our church ministry:

"We must ask ourselves whether our churches and parishes are providing the rich environments that a relationally oriented generation needs to develop deep faith...I believe we need a new mind to measure the vibrancy and health of the intergenerational relationships in our faith communities."¹⁷⁹

Kinnaman's desire is to see older Christians, parents and peers recognize their '*collective calling*' to love, accept, partner with the next generation, and find new ways to retain our youth and to make disciples among this generation.¹⁸⁰

To that end, Kinnaman and others have suggested the following:

1. *Rethinking 'generations'*
2. *Engaging older Christians*
3. *Rethinking leadership teams*
4. *Peer leadership*
5. *Congregational life and service*
6. *Family of families*
7. *Getting started*

1. Rethinking 'generations':

"The changes in adolescent development and the culture-wide disregard for generational connectedness have created a faith system that offers no place for graduates when they leave high school"¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ Orange: Concentrate 9.3.

¹⁷⁸ Matthew Erickson: '*Preparation for the Journey*' (Youth Worker Website) <http://www.youthworker.com/youth-ministry-resources-ideas/youth-ministry/11552564/page-3/>

¹⁷⁹ Kinnaman's research discovered that most young adults do not recall having a meaningful friendship with an adult or adult mentor through their church. That Churches are failing to provide the rich environments that this relationally oriented generation needs to develop deep faith. Kinnaman believes that this is a critical 'gap' in the disciple-making process that must be addressed if we are to adequately respond to youth drop out in our churches. Lost: p.120.

¹⁸⁰ Lost: p.34.

¹⁸¹ Chap Clark: '*Strategic Assimilation: Rethinking the Goal of Youth Ministry*' (Youth Worker website: Mar. 2011) <http://www.youthworker.com/youth-ministry-resources-ideas/youth-ministry/11624001/>

Kinnaman believes the Christian community is one of the few places where those who represent the full scope of human life (from cradle to grave) come together with a *singular motive* and *mission*. In a misguided following of public school instructional models, Kinnaman believes churches have allowed themselves to become internally segregated by age, unintentionally contributing to the rising tide of *alienation* that defines our times, and resulting in youth *enthusiasm* and *vitality* being segregated off from the *wisdom* and *experience* of elders.¹⁸²

Timothy Paul Jones echoes this sentiment:

*“Social or generational similarities are not what define Christian fellowship. The people of God are shaped and defined by Jesus Christ himself, who unites individuals that the world would never dream of bringing together-but not by clustering them in categories of age or special interest or musical preference. Oneness based on such fleeting demographic categories is the same sort of pseudo-unity that the world already offers in the form of tightly niched television programs and marketing campaigns”*¹⁸³

Kinnaman suggests we therefore need a new way of thinking about relationships, generations and generational relationships, the church must recapture the biblical concept of ‘a generation’, one that more adequately reflects the living organism called the church and its heavenly reality (Heb 12:22-24):

*“I have come to believe that we in the church must recapture the biblical concept of a generation...you assume the church is a collection of separate generations, with the older generations given the responsibility of raising young people...but there is a much bigger reality. A generation is every living person who is fulfilling God’s purposes...everybody in the church at a particular time make up a ‘generation’, a generation that is working together in their time to participate in God’s work...The church is a partnership of generations fulfilling God’s purposes in their time”*¹⁸⁴

The belief here, is that rather than assuming the church to be a collection of ‘separate generations’, with older generations given the responsibility of raising young people, the Bible’s view is everybody in the church at any particular time, together make up a ‘generation’, a generation that’s called upon to *work together* to participate in God’s work.

Rather than assuming the church exists to prepare the next generation to fulfil God’s purposes, the church should be a ‘*partnership of generations*’ fulfilling God’s purposes in their time i.e. with *one* single motive and mission.

Churches may not do away with separate children’s or youth ministry, but these programs would be re-evaluated and revamped to make intergenerational relationships a priority.

Kinnaman believes that ‘flourishing intergenerational relationships’ should distinguish the church from the other cultural institutions of our time.

2. Older Christians:

*“Imagine they knew people in every stage of life who were living out their faith against all kinds of challenges: the widowers and divorcees; the childless and the tired parents; the recovering addict and the recent college grad, still resolute in his faith”*¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Lost: p.203.

¹⁸³ Family Ministry Field Guide, p. 129.

¹⁸⁴ Lost: p.203.

¹⁸⁵ David Wright: ‘Don’t Segregate the Youth’ (Gospel Coalition Website: Sept 17th, 2013)
<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tqc/2013/09/17/dont-segregate-the-youth/>

*“There are churches that truly engage college-age people. These churches have a structure that’s strategic, beyond a separate service. They’ve developed a lifelong discipleship process by intentionally connecting people of all generations. Because college-age people stay connected to the people in the church, the outcome is a continuous flow of growing believers”*¹⁸⁶

Across the literature, the place and importance of relationships with older Christians (beyond the home) for the longevity, spiritual nurture and maturity of children, teenagers and young adults was repeatedly emphasised.

Fields’ believes relationships are the key draw card for teenagers and young adults and therefore need high priority, especially relationships with adults who - *“make building relationships with students a high priority, these relationships quicken the ministry’s effectiveness and enhance students’ spiritual maturity”*.¹⁸⁷

Likewise, in his book ‘Youth Ministry on the Front Foot’, Veron notes: *“...rather than working hard at helping youth make the transition, work hard at having genuine overlap between the life-stages by knocking down the paddock fences. Encourage rich relationships across the multi-generational people of God.”*¹⁸⁸

Veron suggests there may still be different programs for different groups but with more multigenerational *connection and engagement* e.g. bringing teenagers and adults together for socializing, camps, final terms of transition, enabling youth involvement and engagement in evening services etc. thereby enabling the breadth of adult contact, interaction and support to act as an extended spiritual family to that of the home.

3. Rethinking leadership teams:

Both the literature and specialist interviews raised the important value of including **parents** and **older adults** onto children and youth leadership teams:

“You need a variety of age groups involved in the kid’s ministry leadership (not just uni/school age group). For example, parents have a vital role in bringing experience and maturity, and they play a crucial role, not only with the kids but also with the younger leaders. Maturity is needed to give balance, and breadth of age helps the growth of young leaders.

The ideal is to have older and younger leaders paired in partnership with each other. They become ‘mentors’ for the kids and mentors for the leaders. And not just mentors in relation to children’s ministry but also in how to be a husband/wife or father/mother, which is so vital for young people and makes their leadership experience fuller. It helps them grow in godliness and wisdom.

*It also needs to be a ‘family’ experience so that kids can see people of all ages following Jesus. Otherwise what the child sees is that you stay Christian until you are about 21 and then it drops off, and that Christians older than 30 have nothing to contribute. This is a bad model to see. They need to see there can be a passion for God, people and others their whole life”*¹⁸⁹

Likewise, Moser and Vernon also believe it’s important to have youth leadership teams that span generations, not just the immediate age above:

“Some of the best leaders around are actually a lot older than the norm. We often fall into the trap of thinking that a good leader is a young leader because they “can relate so well to the young people.” This is often misguided. Young people need leaders who will love them, listen to

¹⁸⁶ Orange: Concentrate 9.3.

¹⁸⁷ PDYM: p.195.

¹⁸⁸ Front Foot: D. Miers, p.138.

¹⁸⁹ Bruce Linton.

*them, and show them Christ. Your age may be a minor detail. Besides, most kids can't tell the difference between 25 and 55. If you are over 21, you are ancient!"*¹⁹⁰

The belief here is that something is seriously wrong if all leaders and mentors of children and youth are only ever drawn from within the late teen or twenty-something age bracket. The Bible itself often couches discipleship in *multigenerational terms* (e.g. Titus 2:1-8), suggesting that a *network of spiritual grandparents, couples, uni students, single adults, empty nesters, and widowers* all provide the richest and most effective context for discipleship outside a biological family unit.

4. The power and importance of peer leadership:

*"We need younger leaders...young Christians who are motivated by godly concern for their own generation, who speak the language of their peers are sorely needed...because today's twentysomethings are living through discontinuously different social, technological and spiritual change"*¹⁹¹

Kinnaman believes the influence of technology, pop culture, media, entertainment, science, and an increasingly secular society are intensifying the differences between the generations. That many churches, leaders, and parents (the established generation) have a difficult time understanding these differences, much less relating to the values, beliefs and assumptions that have spawned them.

What's therefore needed, for both teenagers and young adults, are relationship influences that include solid Christian '*peer leadership*', young spiritually mature youths who are motivated by a *godly concern for their own generation*.

Kinnaman states, that young leaders who '*speak the language of their peers*' are sorely needed because today's twentysomethings are not just slightly or incrementally different from previous generations, but they're living through '*discontinuously different*' social, technological and spiritual change.¹⁹² As already mentioned, Alex and Brett Harris's 'Rebelution' Movement is one such example of the power, importance and profound influence of Christian peer leadership.

5. Congregational life and service:

*"Simply put, we do teens a disservice when we segregate them from the life of the church. When we build youth ministries that don't fold students into the life of the congregation, the unintended consequence is a future of empty pews"*¹⁹³

Research suggests that another important way of bridging the intergenerational gap is finding ways to actively and intentionally *include* children, teens and young adults contribution to the *congregational life of the church*, rather than relegating them to back rooms or back pews.¹⁹⁴

*"Children need to contribute to the church. We need to recognize children's gifts, skills and the ability to model the Christian faith to each other and us"*¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁰ Changing The World: p.100.

¹⁹¹ Lost: p.35.

¹⁹² Kinnaman makes a strong argument that the next generation is different because '*our culture is discontinuously different*'. The cultural setting in which young people have come of age is significantly changed from what was experienced during the formative years of previous generations. Today's youth are being formed under the direct influence of fast paced changes such as the use of free markets, media, advertising, technology, politics, sexuality etc. as our lab tools, the results of which generate incredible fluidity, diversity, complexity and uncertainty in its wake. Kinnaman states that the whole of society is impacted in some way by this rapid change, with 'sixty-something's' living in the same *discontinuously different* culture as the twenty-something's, the critical difference being that Seniors, Boomers & Busters, to some extent, came of age *before* these momentous changes had reached maximum velocity and critical mass. Lost: p.35 & 38.

¹⁹³ D. Wright: '*Don't Segregate the Youth.*'

¹⁹⁴ Lost: p. 122.

¹⁹⁵ Tim Beilharz: '*Developing a Theology of Children*' (Youthworks Website: Oct 11th, 2013)

Re-enforcing faith commitment means children, teenagers and young adults today need more public faith engagement, meaningful 'rites of passage' (such as confirmation, inclusion in praying, serving and bible reading in church) as well as given specific disciple-making responsibilities such as visiting the sick, teaching children, training in mentoring and disciplining those younger etc.¹⁹⁶

*"I learned how to effectively model and shape a biblical view of the church for the youth. What was so different? To start, students were part of the church. Rather than a token "Youth Sunday," we regularly had students serving as ushers, greeters, choristers, music volunteers, and Scripture readers. Some of our older teens were teaching Sunday school, and when the church gathered for various functions, teens joined in the mix. This was an intergenerational church family where relationships spanned decades and all ages served side by side. Sure, we had youth Bible study groups and other activities specifically for students, but that never precluded their involvement in the gathered church"*¹⁹⁷

Joiner believes that the spiritual formation of children and teenagers is closely connected to the act of *servicing* in particular. That if we fail to help kids make a practical investment of time and energy into serving others, their hearts will never mature in learning to care for, and serve others (particularly as they transition towards high school and college).¹⁹⁸

*"By not only teaching me about the Bible, but allowing me to serve and lead, high school provided me with the necessary views of Christianity to really begin to seek my relationship with Christ on my own as I set out from home"*¹⁹⁹

Both children and teenagers need consistent *practical opportunities* to develop their faith, and guided *hands on* encounters with ministry that give them a personal sense of God's mission, and opportunities to influence others growth in the kingdom.²⁰⁰

6. 'Family of families':

*"We have all failed our kids by training them to think that faith is more about homogeneous safety and independent faith commitments than communal living and intimate cross-generational relationships with the family of faith"*²⁰¹

Finally, we must always remember that the Church exists, not as separate biological family units, but primarily (and more significantly) as a spiritual home, a *family of families*, where each one is a brother, sister, mother or father, and as such, each has responsibility to and for the nurture and discipleship of one another:

"As a family, or the Family of families, the church community is where teenagers can see models of godly decision making in the young adult 'older brothers and sisters'; where they can learn from models of long term faithfulness in the elder 'grandparents in the faith'; where young people from broken and divided homes can find role models and advocates in spiritual

<http://www.youthworks.net/articles/developing-a-theology-of-children/>

¹⁹⁶ Slater makes the point that we need to allow young people and children to make a contribution to the life of the church. That when Paul writes of the gifts of the risen Jesus has entrusted to the church, there's no indication that the works of service produced by these gifts are restricted to those over eighteen. The use of gifts is also a great way to cultivate right attitudes and maturity in the young. FAQ's: p.122. Likewise Fields believes that the sign of a healthy church is one that helps *all* Christians, regardless of age, to discover their gifts and express them through serving in ministry. Our role as leaders is to follow the pattern set out in Eph 4:11-12 and help prepare *all* God's people for works of service. PDYM: p.177.

¹⁹⁷ D. Wright: 'Don't Segregate the Youth.'

¹⁹⁸ Orange: p.206.

¹⁹⁹ *Sticky Faith: Youth Worker Edition*: p. 97

²⁰⁰ It is important to note here that some of the marks of being a true follower of Christ are the call to a life of obedience, sacrifice, servanthood and suffering (Deut. 10:12, Matt 16:24-25, 28:20, Mk 8:34-35, Lk 14:25-27, Jn 14:15-24, Eph 4:12, 1Pet 4:9 - 11, Phil 1:29, 2Cor 1:5) as well as the command to specifically demonstrate love to the brethren, and to obey the 'one another' commands (1Jn, 3:21-24,4:7, Gal 6:10). Therefore it is important to instil, not only this understanding, but also its practice, in our children from the earliest age.

²⁰¹ Clark: 'Strategic Assimilation' p.3.

parents”²⁰²

Chap Clark believes one of our responsibilities is to regularly remind and call the *whole church* back to the **baptism promises** they made as a congregation to care and to nurture children through all of life’s stages, and especially as they transition from youth to church or out of one congregation to another:

*“In most church communities, when an infant or child is baptized or dedicated, the adults and families publicly promise to care for and nurture that child throughout his or her life. This shift to seeing the end goal of youth ministry as assimilation is a call to your entire congregation to follow through on the promise they made. Make sure the entire body is aware the church is expected to receive with open arms the full partnership and participation of the graduating seniors into the life of the church. The key is to hammer away so often at this message that it’ll become part of the continuing story of the church”*²⁰³

Likewise, Beckwith believes the *biological* family; the broader *church family* and *peers* all play a vital and necessary role in the spiritual formation of children, teenagers and young adults. All 3 spheres have the potential to powerfully nurture faith formation. The Church’s challenge is to find creative ways to bring that potential to fruition. Beckwith espouses the need for *bringing the* generations together *as a family*, and congregations as places where life can be shared, relationships grow, experiences shared, and a visible and tangible means of tempering the prevalent cultural separation and ageism.²⁰⁴

Note: For two examples of church models that have attempted to address the intergenerational issue, read – ‘*Perspectives on Family Ministry: 3 Views*’ in the appendix section of this paper. More particularly, note the ‘*Family-based*’ philosophy and ‘*Family equipping*’ model.

7. Tips on getting intergenerational ministry started:

*“As many churches are finding though, simple proximity doesn’t equal relationships. Being in the same room does open the possibility for relationship, but it’s not the whole answer to the problem of the adult-kid divide many of us experience in our congregations. Intergenerational youth ministry ends up being a great new catch phrase that in practice tends to be really vague to most churches”*²⁰⁵

Research suggested the following strategies for getting true intergenerational ministry happening:²⁰⁶

7:1. Assessing current conditions:

Prayerfully and honestly assessing current ministry structures, practices and motives, including congregational attitudes to age-stratified structures and openness to change.

7:2. Begin with existing structures:

Intergenerational ministry is not “one size fits all,” it is context-specific and should be customized to fit a particular church’s history, culture, location, staff, and vision. Churches

²⁰² G. Stanton: ‘*Mickey Mouse Youth Ministry*’ (Sydney Anglicans Website: Feb. 22nd, 2010)
http://sydneyanglicans.net/ministry/modernministry/mickey_mouse_youth_ministry

²⁰³ Clark: ‘*Strategic Assimilation*’. P.4.

²⁰⁴ Formational: p.131f. Interestingly, Kinnaman makes the observation from his data that young adults’ ability to grow in faith withers when they persist in narcissism, entitlement, and out of proportion self-confidence. His belief is that many youth have an unrealistic self-assessment that’s aided and abetted by a culture that glorifies youth as inherently beautiful, valuable, and wise. The marketing media obsession with youth and young adults has led to two negative consequences: 1. It reinforces the very modern notion that the next generation must be catered to before all else. 2. It fuels the damaging misperception that older people don’t have much value to offer younger generations, thereby increasing generational fragmentation in our cultural imagination, and contributing to the shallowness of the generation. Lost: p.117.

²⁰⁵ ‘*Intergenerational Ministry: Beyond The Rhetoric*’.

²⁰⁶ ‘*Intergenerational Ministry: Beyond The Rhetoric*’.

should start with what they're already doing well in one of the ministries of the church, then ask - "what would it take to move to the next level and use this to become intergenerational?" Identify key influencers in the congregation who already have an intergenerational mindset and enlist their help.

7:3. Establish intergenerational ministry as a core value:

Intergenerational ministry is not something that churches 'do' - it's something they 'become'. It's a paradigm shift. The whole church must value intergenerational relationships and community at a core philosophical level. This shift requires that all leaders of the church (not just the youth leader) buy into the value of intergenerational ministry and commit to changing a church culture over the long haul.

7:4. Keep Intergenerational values in balance with age-specific ministry:

Establishing intergenerational community doesn't mean eradicating age-specific ministries. We realize that exclusively age-specific ministry may be "working" to varying degrees, but has not proven sustainable for ongoing transmission of faith among young adults who have grown up exclusively in youth ministries. At the same time, all ages need their own space to grow and develop at their own pace. The whole church needs to be part of a web of relationships that includes disciple-making engagement with peers AND members of other generations.

7:5. Leadership must be fully vested:

Successfully transitioning to an intergenerational paradigm starts with the leadership. In order to make such a culture shift, the senior leadership team must be on board with the vision and actively take the reins in leading the congregation through the transition.

7:6. Be intentional and strategic:

Start small and avoid big sweeping program changes, particularly before there is adequate ownership of the vision on the part of all stakeholders. Celebrate little wins. Tell stories of success to encourage the congregation and build momentum.

7:7. Build in accountability and support structures:

Everything should pass through an "intergenerational filter", regularly asking how plans can be made in such a way as to keep the church moving toward being an authentic intergenerational community.

7:8. Experiment with intergenerational ministry practices:

The main congregational worship service is one key area of opportunity to implement intergenerational strategies, as long as the services are designed to include all generations. Intentionally involve teenagers and younger kids in some aspect of the corporate worship, and plan worship gatherings with every age in mind. Start small e.g. once each quarter the entire congregation worships together and experiments with creative approaches.

However, multigenerational worship services alone may not be effective in building authentic community without providing other settings to develop and maintain meaningful relationships across the generations. Consider ways to build relationships between all combinations of children, teenagers, singles, parents, empty-nesters and senior adults. Experimenting with integrating intergenerational relational opportunities in small groups, Sunday school, outreach events and special programs.

7:9. Prepare the church properly:

A common error is not adequately preparing and equipping youth and adults for the experience. All must understand that some goals and expected outcomes will necessarily be different when different generations are involved.

2:6 Managing Transition Stages Well:

*“In one tragic summer, the group lost three quarters of its membership. Some had good reasons for leaving; others had simply decided to move on. The youth ministry didn’t hold them. It was as if the bottle had been knocked over and most of the contents poured out”*²⁰⁷

*“In most churches it seems like we are disconnecting when the stakes are the highest... we are not tapping into the relational influence when the felt need is the greatest”*²⁰⁸

It soon becomes clear that if we’re to retain our youth and young adults, and strengthen their Christian commitment and gospel conviction into adulthood, then much greater attention and forethought must be given to creating specific strategies and appropriate ‘transition programs’ intentionally tailored for **each particular age group** and **each transitional stage**.

As mentioned, each transitional life stage will come with vast differences in emotional, social and spiritual need, and will therefore require *thoughtful attention, intentional preparation* and *supportive oversight* (from peers, parents, churches, supportive adults and ministry staff alike) to collaborate and structure best methods of youth retention and effective transition for their particular context.

It’s also clear that we must address transitional needs ‘holistically’, in all aspects of the person (i.e. spiritually, emotionally, psychologically & socially) if we’re to fully assist individuals to consciously and comfortably bridge across each transition.

And finally, we must ensure there’s a *unified approach* to ministry in the church, develop youth as *disciples and disciple-makers*, reengage *parents* in the spiritual oversight of their children, and intentionally foster *intergenerational relationships* and adult mentors.

The 5 suggestions that now follow are a few practical, relational and structural strategies aimed at assisting ministries and parents as they seek to help youth transition well. Whatever structures or strategies we may choose to put in place, our aim should be to ensure a seamless, secure and confident movement *between* and *across* each transition stage, and provide an *intentional* process that enables each individual to become an established, fully devoted and mature follower of Christ Jesus at the end.

5 suggestions for transitioning well:

1. Equip and prepare
2. Manage critical moments of concern
3. Create rites of passage
4. Provide threefold support and ‘strategic flow’
5. Develop a ‘birth to graduation’ philosophy

1. Equip and prepare:

As well as reasons already noted, general research suggest many core issues surrounding our youth drop out is the feeling of being **ill-equipped, over protected** and **unprepared** for change and transition, and the resolution to these issues lay in both the home and the church.

²⁰⁷ Changing The World: p.9.

²⁰⁸ Think Orange: 9.2.

*“According to students themselves, most don’t feel set up for success in the transition to college. This is especially tragic given our research showing that feeling prepared matters. The more students feel prepared – whether it be to find a church, engage in a ministry, make friends, or how to handle new choices about alcohol, sex and parties – the more likely their faith is to grow”*²⁰⁹

This finding has been supported by a secular longitudinal study by Amundson, Borgen, and Tench, which found that young people frequently left high school unprepared for current career realities, and that both career and personal areas of their lives were in a state of change and uncertainty.²¹⁰

The study discovered that: *“approximately 9 and 18 months following graduation, depression, self-esteem, and anxiety were correlated with a range of perceived problems, including money, lack of support from family and friends, internal attribution of general transition problems, external attribution of career/employment difficulties, and lack of job satisfaction”*.²¹¹

When interviewed about factors that had helped or hindered the post-high school transition, respondents indicated that: *“positive factors included supportive family and friends, making money, satisfying leisure activities, personal achievements, and educational success. Negative factors included relationship problems, career confusion, financial difficulties, unemployment, lack of satisfying work, lack of post-secondary educational opportunities, and difficulty in adjusting to post-secondary educational demands”*.²¹²

In response to these concerns, research suggests there are several key areas in which parents; supportive adults and church ministries can be more strategic and intentional in equipping and preparing adolescents and young adults for change and transition, thereby reducing negative factors and generating greater likelihood of positive outcomes.

1:1 Laying strong spiritual foundations:

Barna’s “exit interviews” with teenagers indicated that the *spiritual foundation* laid by families and churches when they were younger was often *inadequate* (e.g. comparatively few early teens indicated they learned enough Bible content to enable them to make important life decisions on the basis of biblical principles).

It also became apparent that some teenagers had already made up their minds that once they become independent of their parents they would abandon church. This reinforces the need for discipling support and faith re-enforcement to happen not just in the home but across all Christian relationships and connections, family, church and peers.²¹³

1:2 Providing realistic reassurance and positive practical support:

Psychology today notes, parents in particular have a crucial part to play in helping their child be more prepared for change and transition but often feel unprepared themselves for managing change: *“change... is the part of the life curriculum where parents are often least prepared to be instructive. Often, they don’t know how to define change, explain the power of change, and suggest how to manage change when it occurs”*.²¹⁴

²⁰⁹ Sticky Faith: p.151.

²¹⁰ ‘Adolescent Transitions’: (The International Child and Youth Care Network: Issue 27, April 2001)

<http://www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cycol-0401-transitions.html>. Amundson, N. E., Borgen, W. A., & Tench, E. (in press). Personality and intelligence in career education and vocational guidance counseling: D. H. Saklofske & M. Zeidner (Eds.) *International Handbook of Personality and Intelligence*, New York: Plenum.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Barna: ‘Spiritual Progress Hard to Find’: (December 22nd, 2003).

²¹⁴ Pickhardt: ‘Educating Adolescents About Coping With Change’.

*“...the first step is for parents is to recognise that transitions always involve a move out of the comfort zone. Reassure your child that it is perfectly normal to be apprehensive, nervous or worried. Chat about what it was like for you... Give them a chance to express what they are most worried about. Fears get cut down to size a bit when you say them out loud. Even if they are non-talkers, all kids crave security. They need to hear reassurance that you are there for them no matter what other things are changing in their world, and to know that you care”*²¹⁵

Andrew Nixon (of Youthworks) had these helpful reflections on helping youth make adjustments to new groups and new situations after helping his child through this process:²¹⁶

- We prepared our son by saying that it might take time to make new friends and get fully settled. Maybe this would happen quickly (bonus!) but it usually takes a while, perhaps many months, to break into groups and get established.
- We made attendance a priority and helped him be enthusiastic (even when we didn't feel like going out to drop him off either). This helped him to form the habit of being there every week; helped him get established more quickly with peers; and helped him develop a ministry mindset (for example, inviting friends to come because he planned to be there).
- We made an effort to meet and get to know the youth leaders, stayed around to chat at drop-off, pick-up etc. We got involved in the meal/supper roster. This all helped us 'sus out' the dynamics of what was going on so we could chat to our son about it, and understand the 'who', 'why' and 'wherefore'.
- We invited peers over to our home so our son could further develop relationships with kids he clicked with. We also caught up with whole families so the kids could all hang out with a bit less pressure.
- Things like weekends away and social outings were considered a priority for him. These are times of very valuable shared experience for the kids. Missing them is a double-whammy: not only do they miss high value 'assimilation' time, but they feel excluded from the inevitable 'war stories' once back at the regular group.

1:3 Helping them deal with loss and recognize change as an ongoing part of life:

Part of equipping and preparing kids for change is to help them perceive change as a 'constant' rather than a static aspect of life; to understand the internal and external disruption it may cause for a time, but also recognizing the resilience it potentially builds in learning to managing and grow through change as an ongoing aspect of life.

*“Sometimes I wish it was possible that my children could avoid the disruption from being uprooted out of their familiar environment, through the changing of my job. However, I also know that the challenging journey of change can actually help them build resilience, and to enable them to cope with other changes that they will inevitably face in the future”*²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Andrew Nixon: 'Transitioning into Youth Group' (Growing Faith Website: Feb. 15, 2011). http://growingfaith.com.au/parenting/transitioning_into_youth_group

²¹⁶ Nixon: 'Transitioning into Youth Group'. Note here, according to the National Children's Bureau: not getting the necessary support through difficult transitions also leaves a child vulnerable to learning unhealthy responses to events and situations. Conversely, if a child experiences positive, supportive relationships, then they learn to respond in a similar way, with their responses becoming habitual or 'hardwired' into the brain. 'Supporting Children and Young People Through Transition'. P.2.

²¹⁷ Jodie McNeill: 'Leading Your Kids Through Change': (Growing Faith Website: June. 4th, 2012) <http://growingfaith.com.au/parenting/leading-your-kids-through-change>.

Part of assisting children and teenagers manage to understand and manage the impact of change is helping them recognize that change will often involve 'loss,' and losses are to rightly be recognized and grieved.

"All through adolescence, there is a trade-off continually taking place as younger interests and attachments are cast off so older ones can be taken on. Here the lesson can teach how CHANGE CREATES LOSS.

Thus it takes a huge sacrifice to enter adolescence because one must give up so much that was a cherished part of childhood. Growing up requires giving up. Adolescence is expensive because there is always an entry price to pay. To work for more independence means letting former dependencies go.

From what I've seen in counseling, young people who cope best with hard changes in life tend to be those who are able to journey through pain to the other side of loss. There, they are able to claim the opportunities that are always opened up by change, no matter how unwelcome or adverse that upsetting and resetting of the terms of their existence may be."²¹⁸

Jodie McNeill shared these helpful ideas as he recently took his family through a major job and location shift:

1. We shared with them the need for the change:

Mandy and I have spent time sharing with our kids the reasons behind our decision to change where I work. For a while we've spoken to our kids about plans for me to move from a para-church organisation, into parish-based ministry. Helping them understand the thinking behind the decision, has helped them prepare for the many changes that will accompany my new role.

2. We gradually told them details over time:

We decided to gradually tell our kids more and more about the things that were about to happen. Early in the process, we drove them past the new church, we pointed out the school they would probably go to and the house in which we were likely to live.

We didn't suddenly drop the whole change upon them like a bombshell (?), but instead tried to gradually help them be prepared for the new things that were soon to be upon our family.

However, we made the decision that we would share more with our older, teenage girls than with our younger boys. This was a way in which we could include our teenage girls in the whole venture, and it showed that we trusted them and valued their input in the whole process of making decisions about the future.

3. We prayed with, and for, the kids:

As Mandy and I have prayed with each other and with our kids, we've been asking God to prepare us for the changes ahead.

We've prayed that God would provide us with a new church in which we could serve, a home in which we could live, and a school that would help our kids grow. We have joined together as a family to ask God to provide us with our needs, and prepared ourselves for him to answer that prayer in the way that he would see fit.

This has modelled to our kids the fact that we try to depend on God for all these things,

²¹⁸ Pickhardt: 'Educating Adolescents About Coping With Change'.

especially in times of instability.²¹⁹

1:4 Avoiding cloistering, over-managing and over protecting:

The **National Children's Bureau** states: "the key to moving through the expected and unexpected transitions children and young people face is for them to have the best **emotional health** and sense of **well-being** they can, and to develop **emotional resilience**. As surely as they need good food for physical health, children and young people need sustenance for their emotional health".²²⁰

Bird and Gerlach (2005) described emotional health and 'well-being' as:

*"...the subjective capacity and state of mind that supports us to feel good about how we are and confident to deal with present and future circumstances. It is influenced by our emotional development and how **resilient and resourceful** we feel ourselves to be"*²²¹

Research indicates the current culture of *cloistering*, *'over-managing'* and *overprotecting* children (physically, practically or emotionally) cuts across the ability for children to develop this emotional resilience, and is one contributing factor for youth *unpreparedness* for the challenges that lie ahead.

Kinnaman found 'helicopter parenting' (and/or 'velcro' parenting) and the overall cultural fixation on 'safety and protectiveness' was having a profound effect on the church's ability to disciple the next generation.²²² Jenny Brown's book "*Growing Yourself Up*" captures this overprotection fixation well:

*"It seems that the more frantic the pace of life becomes, and the more anxiety mounts about our uncertain future, the more society panders to its children. There is less space for children to think and solve problems for themselves, as both parents and schools manage their schedules for them...meanwhile many children are less able to take a stand for themselves against schoolyard teasing; they are less able to direct their own learning efforts; and when adolescence arrives, they are **ill prepared** for managing their new freedoms responsibly"*²²³

Kinnaman's research discovered that many young Christians feel overprotected, shielded from failure and regret, fearful of, and detached from the world, and unprepared for the life issues they face. Though presenting with *outward confidence*, in reality the prevalence of youth 'over-management' only served to increase their sense of general insecurity, lack of *internal confidence* and self-doubt. Consequently, neither are they emotionally, or spiritually, prepared for a life of risk, independence, adventure or service to God – a God who asks them to lay down their lives for his kingdom.²²⁴

In this regard, Brown and Condie had the following insightful comments to make:

*"...the parenting challenge in the midst of this rush is to take over their children's capacities to soothe their upsets and solve their problems...if you're going to assist your child to grow their resilience, the first step will be to **increase your own resilience** in tolerating your own child's upset without feeling compelled to rush in and smooth over everything for them"*²²⁵

²¹⁹ McNeill: '*Leading Your Kids Through Change*'.

²²⁰ 'Supporting Children and Young People Through Transition'. P.1.

²²¹ 'Supporting Children and Young People Through Transition'. P.1. Bird J. and Gerlach L. (2005) '*Improving the Emotional Health and Well-being of Young People in Secure Care: Training for staff in local authority secure children's homes*'. London: National Children's Bureau.

²²² Sticky Faith describes the Velcro parent(s) as those who find it impossible to detach and enable independence. Those who have forgotten the principle: *don't do for a child what they should be learning to do for themselves*. P. 158.

²²³ Jenny Brown: '*Growing Yourself Up: How to Bring Your Best to All of Life's Relationships*' (Exisle Publishing: Wollombi, 2012) p. 107-108.

²²⁴ Kinnaman notes that this overprotectiveness can lead youth to look for excitement outside traditional boundaries e.g. sex, drugs, thrill seeking etc. or other forms of spirituality. Lost: p.98-100.

²²⁵ *Growing Yourself Up*: p.108.

*“From a very young age, we can be teaching our children how to deal with life when things don't go our way. We don't have to make our children feel better, nor do we need to rescue them. This is the challenge...to equip our children to deal with the blows of life, and to **develop resilience**. In Psalm 13:1-6... David models a way of dealing with despair and a difficult season in life that is wise and godly. We can begin helping our children deal with the disappointments, frustrations, hurts and sadness's that will inevitably come their way. They are a part of living in a broken world”*²²⁶

The *National Children's Bureau* suggest some of the key skills, qualities and experiences that children and young people need to build emotional resilience are:²²⁷

- Manage risk-taking and cope with the outcomes
- Have optimism and a sense of possibility
- Be self-aware and able to learn and develop from experience
- Celebrate success
- Be able to ask for help
- Take care of oneself
- Develop empathy
- Manage loss

In particular, developing emotional resilience will mean children and young people need to be able to take risks with and without supervision – as appropriate – and learn from the consequences. There are times when it's important that children and young people are able to work through the risk they're about to take on their own, and find ways of managing that risk and coping with the outcome.

By doing this without adult intervention, children can learn directly from their own experience – mistakes included. In turn this builds *self-confidence* and *emotional resilience* as a child learns to manage both successes and 'failures'.²²⁸

1:5 Awareness of how each child (and prior context) may differ:

Tony Akers, in his article *'Tips for Parents: Helping Your Child Transition into the Youth Ministry'*, encourages parents (and others) to consider how differently each child responds to change and transition, particularly as they negotiate new relationships and different social settings:

*“Negotiating the relational world of youth ministry can be a bit daunting for youth, and the success or failure of that negotiation most directly effects the strength of motivation a young person has to continue engaging in the ministry”*²²⁹

Akers believes each child's personality, expectation and 'connection to church' affect how they may

²²⁶ Sarah Condie: *'A Wise Mum Helps Her Children Deal With the Stuff of Life'* (Growing Faith Website; Dec 12, 2012).

²²⁷ 'Supporting Children and Young People Through Transition'. P.2.

²²⁸ *'Supporting Children and Young People Through Transition'*. P.2. It's worth noting here that: 'not intervening' should not be confused with not supporting or encouraging a child in what they are doing as they try to work out the best way to take their next challenge. Learning when and how to ask for help, i.e. for adult or peer intervention, is an intrinsic part of risk-taking too. If help is wanted, it is important that children and young people are made aware of who is the best person to ask, and have the skills to know how to ask for what they need.

²²⁹ Tony Akers: *'Tips for Parents: Helping Your Child Transition into Youth Ministry'*: (Center for Youth Ministry Website, May 15th, 2013) <http://www.cymt.org/tips-for-parents-helping-your-child-transition-into-the-youth-ministry/>

negotiate transitional shifts.

To outline his point, Akers divides children into three ‘types’, the ‘active’ child, the ‘in the wings’ child and the ‘newcomer’, each different type facing unique challenges and expectations:

“Typically, most youth ministries see three types of kids entering the youth program. It is instructive to identify which “type” your child is in order to be aware of how they are connecting socially.

The first type, “active,” was involved in the children’s ministry, the second has been waiting “in the wings,” and the third will be the “newcomer.” Each type of kid brings certain expectations and challenges and has some trouble transitioning into the youth ministry for one reason or another”²³⁰

The **“active child”** with long involvement in a children’s ministry that’s been intentional and highly structured may struggle adjusting to a youth ministry that may be structured differently:

“The transition from children’s ministry to youth ministry can be characterized by a shift from a highly structured/low relational contact setting to a casually structured/highly relational environment”²³¹

For this child, the transition can be difficult if they make the assumption they’ll experience an older version of children’s ministry.

For the church child - **“in the wings”** that may not have attended the children’s ministry, and may be waiting to be old enough to attend youth ministry, will face their own challenges. Having been ‘around church’ may mean they expect immediate connection with others they may ‘know’, but that connection may not always happen, or happen easily.

“They will be brand new to the youth ministry setting, to adult leaders involved, and to peers their own age. Your child may be expecting immediate connection and may not find it since most of their active peers have already formed friendship clusters that may be difficult to break into....Excitement can turn into despair as the “in the wings” child battles relational hurdles to get plugged in”²³²

Lastly, the **“newcomer”** is someone who might not have attended church, so there will be a huge adjustment and orientation process. Christians have their own way of speaking and church ministries their own way of operating which are quite foreign to the un-churched.

In response, Akers makes the following suggestions (for parents particularly) to ease these particular transition tensions:²³³

- **Communicate!** Let the youth staff know your child is struggling. Strategies can be formed that will help them through the transition.
- **Stay calm.** Anxiety is catching! An anxious parent will create an anxious child. Over the years I have seen students mirror their parents in developing reasons why they should not become fully integrated in the youth ministry. It is essential to remember that God is in control and is fully committed to seeing your child grow in faith.

²³⁰ Akers: *Tips for Parents: Helping Your Child Transition into Youth Ministry.*

²³¹ Akers: *Tips for Parents: Helping Your Child Transition into Youth Ministry.*

²³² Akers: *Tips for Parents: Helping Your Child Transition into Youth Ministry.*

²³³ Akers: *Tips for Parents: Helping Your Child Transition into Youth Ministry.*

- **Visit.** Dropping by the youth office/youth area. Have the youth staff to show them around and explain the program.
- **Open your home and host a Bible study.** Having other youth on your home “turf” can help break the ice.
- **Ask the youth staff to assign an older youth “buddy”** to your son or daughter to assist with the transition. Most ministries have youth leadership teams that could assist with this ministry.
- **Suggest and help coordinate** a transitional rite of passage that celebrates the arrival of the new students.
- **Invite the youth staff over for dinner.** Getting to know the staff in this casual setting will help your son or daughter realize they are special and cared for by the staff.
- **Model your commitment to faith development in your own life.** Make attendance in worship and Bible studies a priority. In many ways, faith is more caught than taught. In most cases what you model will be what you get reflected back in the life of your child.

1:6 Nurture ‘participation’ over ‘spectator’ ethic:

It’s not only parents that may be leaving youth shielded and over-managed, but sometimes the youth and children’s ministries themselves.

Some college ministries indicated surprise that new students, rather than coming equipped to lead and serve, lack leadership and initiative. They believe teenagers need to be trained early to be *participants* and *initiative takers* and not mere spectators and consumers of Christian life and ministry, or fearful of trying new things and taking responsibility. They see these challenges developing in high school and want youth pastors and churches to partner with college ministries to turn the tide.

Several college ministries made the following observations:

*“One thing that I wish youth pastors understood about students and college is that youth pastors must help their students develop a **participant ethic** rather than a **spectator ethic**. Youth need to be conditioned and challenged to ‘get in the game’ of ministry, rather than be audience members who show up each week desiring to be entertained by the pastor. If they have been born of God, they are empowered by the Holy Spirit for a purpose: to go and make disciples. Any preparation that does not integrate this mission into their fabric is falling short of the mark, and making my job much more difficult, as I then have to overcome the ‘holy huddle’ culture of those Christians who gather together merely for social and entertainment purposes”*²³⁴

*“Recently... it seems that students are paralyzed at the thought of taking part in the ministry themselves, as opposed to having the program planned for them and they just show up. If youth pastors would start earlier empowering students, in an effort to help them make decisions and see a plan come to fruition, for us in campus ministry there would most likely be an increase in students taking ownership of ministry and living into the fact that Christ has set them free to do so much for this world, including for their own peers on campus”*²³⁵

²³⁴ Thiessen: ‘Preparation for the Journey’

²³⁵ Ryan Church: ‘Preparation for the Journey’

2. Manage critical moments of concern:

“Transitioning out of high school into college is like you’re leaving on a giant cruise ship.

You’re heading out of this harbor and everyone’s waving you off.

Let’s say this ship is your faith. As soon as you start sailing out to this new port called college, you realize you’re in a dingy. You don’t have this huge ship, and you’re completely not prepared, and your boat is sinking! Unless there’s someone with a life raft who’s ready to say, “we got you. Come right here.

This is where you can be, and this is where you can grow,” you’re done”²³⁶

“We have to face the reality that the college-age years are the biggest disconnecting point for people.

Church leaders talk about this problem, but few have developed a strategy that bridges the disconnection”²³⁷

Research tells us there are several critical ‘transition moments’ in the movement towards adulthood and independence that demand careful attention, intentional preparation and supportive oversight e.g. primary to high school, school leavers at year 10, high school to university and university to work. Careful attention and forethought must be given to creating specific strategies and appropriate ‘transition programs’ intentionally tailored for **each particular age group** and **each transitional stage**.

Below are some suggestions and strategies for each transition stage.

2:1 Transitioning from Primary to High School:

a. Create a ‘mid-school’ model: Develop a ‘bridging group’ that spans years 6-8 which transitions primary school seniors with early high school juniors. This group becomes a distinctive entity from the traditional ‘Sunday School’ or ‘Kids Church’. Children begin enter into this group in the 4th term in year 6 so that there’s an overlap in transition times and relationships begin to be forged across the ages.

b. Integrate the leadership: Try interconnecting the children’s ministry leadership with the youth ministry in the lead up to transition. Consider how the youth minister might be involved in significant events towards the end of year 6 (holiday club, kids camp, graduation events etc.) to forge connections with the new students and prepare relationships for transition. What’s important is that the children’s and youth ministers work together to create the best experience for kids in transition.

c. Formal graduation lunch or dinner: Host a special event for graduating year 6’s and parents. Consider having the high school leaders come to meet and encourage them. Have a recent high school-er give a short address on how to make the most of the first year in youth group and high school.

d. Create a welcome/information pack: Prepare a separate pack for both parents and child. Packs could include a card to the student signed by the children’s ministry staff and youth staff, information on the youth ministry, testimonials from youth ministry members, a special invite to the first event and a small gift.

e. ‘Move Up’ night: Plan a date with the children’s ministry that marks the weekend students will transition from children’s ministry into youth ministry. Have a count down calendar with special activities that mark ‘endings and new beginnings’ built into the final term program in the lead up to the big night. Make the night a real celebration with shared stories and experiences, highs and lows, pictures and photos of events shared and special memories.

f. Make phone calls to students in transition: Have past leaders keep connections with students in the early stages of transition to help smooth over any glitches. Have new leaders also make connections before they move up, phone or send messages, let them know you look forward to getting to know them more

²³⁶ Sticky Faith: Youth Worker Edition, p.18

²³⁷ Think Orange: 9.3.

through youth ministry. Have each child's old and new small group leader joint host a casual fun event with both leaders & new students together.

g. Have students pray for each other: In the lead up to transition have the youth group regularly pray for the new members about to join. Pair up a youth member with a yr 6 child to gather prayer points and to encourage.

2:2 Transitioning from Year 10 to Senior High:

This is often the age where teenagers are first given the option to not be forced to attend church, if they do attend, they often no longer want to sit with parents and younger siblings.

This is therefore a good moment to try and settle them into a younger service where teenagers can begin to act independently of their parents and yet receive spiritual nurture and support from other trusting adults and peers. For some, this may involve training parents to think strategically, and sometimes being prepared to come to church twice if necessary.

In terms of youth programming, transitioning those in year 10 over into a senior high group in 4th term of year 10, enables them to start making new connections and familiarize themselves to new groups and leaders before the major break at the end of that year. Have their junior high leaders also transition with them during this process is optimal as an intentional 'hand holding' strategy.

2:3 Transitioning from High School to University/College:

Research suggests these are the key concerns of students moving out of high school and on to college/Uni.

- Making friends
- Sudden instability of a new environment
- Engaging in Christian activity/making Christian connections
- Managing "daily life management" e.g. time, money, limitless boundaries, constant decisions
- Managing the pressures of the social scene & expectations

One of the most critical periods in the life transition process is the movement from *school to university*, particularly the *first two weeks* (and especially so for those who've moved away from home). Research noted as students arrive on campus they undergo a barrage of new ideas, opportunities, experiences, and relationships. The first 2 weeks are when students often tend to make key decisions about drinking and other high-risk behaviours, including whether to go to church or engage in a campus ministry. Many decisions made during that time are highly influenced by new friends, new living circumstances and new environment.

*"Over and over, students have told us that the first two weeks are when they make key decisions about drinking and other high-risk behaviours, right along with choosing whether to go to church or to a campus ministry...many of these decisions are influenced by the new friends and situations in which they put themselves. Most kids are unprepared for the intensity of those first few days and weeks and have no strategy for how to make decisions during that critical time"*²³⁸

For many, the lack of adequate *practical preparation* for independent living also means that just managing daily life often became overwhelming and all consuming:

"Facing the sudden instability of the new environment, schedule, and virtually limitless boundaries, operating from day to day becomes a practice of sheer survival...nearly half of

²³⁸ Sticky Faith: p.151. Sticky Faith has some excellent suggestions for parents in helping them more adequately prepare their teenager for transition and independence. See pages 154f.

*students in our study felt anxious that so much was suddenly up to them to decide...We also found students struggle most to integrate their faith with their handling of time and money”*²³⁹

Though research indicates that engaging in a church or campus ministry during the first year makes a big difference in supporting the transition process, most young teenagers also felt totally unprepared for the intensity of that zone and had no clear strategy for how to find a church or how to make decisions during that time. Finding a new church fell among the top 3 most difficult parts of the transition.²⁴⁰

*“Compared to high school, I know more about myself and less about what I believe than I used to. I hope this will resolve at some point in my life...at this point it’s on hold because I don’t have the time or the tools. It’s hard to find time to think about religion or God, and college feels more like living from one day to the next and losing focus on big picture things”*²⁴¹

Another issue of concern was their emotional/social unpreparedness for the intense sense of ‘loneliness’ they often felt, especially their lack of ability to initiate, search out or make ‘new friends’. When students go off to college/Uni, their number one fear is not making any friends. This is why so many Christian students can get derailed off the spiritual path during these early weeks and months. They can quickly feel pressured to engage in the stereotypical Uni lifestyle of drinking and sexual activity.

How might we better prepare our students making the transition from high school to university? The following are some suggestions.

a. Develop a ‘transition year’ post high school: One idea is extending their high school small group leaders role for an extra year as a means of pastoral/discipleship oversight for previous group members in their first year of college/uni, assisting them in bridging the transition.

Their role could include practical and pastoral activities such as:

- * Visiting them on their Uni campus
- * Set up a day each week to send messages on Facebook and encourage them
- * Help them make connections with a new local church ministry and the campus ministry
- * Meet up with them each time they are home on holidays or more regularly if still at church
- * Help them find replacement mentors
- * Walk alongside them as they transition to the adult service, find avenues to keep serving & growing

b. Stay connected: Have youth pastors, older adult mentor figures and churches remain connected to their students as they head off. Too often, seniors graduate and all the attention in the youth ministry immediately turns to the incoming group, while the high school graduates stumble their way into the next phase of Christian connection. As already discussed, the first few weeks and months are crucial. Youth pastors already have the relationships that campus ministers are seeking to build, and are therefore a critical resource in retention and transition.

“Please don’t abandon your recent graduates once they head off, especially for the first year or six months. With students who make a good transition spiritually, you are still a welcome and influential voice. For those who struggle, a call or visit or contact initiated by you during their first months and weeks could pay dividends in their lives which would be hard to overstate. You still have access and influence in their lives which no newly found collegiate minister (assuming they even have one) can match, so please use it.”

²³⁹ Sticky Faith: p.153.

²⁴⁰ Fewer than 40% of students felt prepared to find a new church. Only 40% of youth group alum attending an on-campus fellowship once a week or more, with 57% attending church once a week or more. Sticky Faith: p.152.

²⁴¹ Sticky Faith: p.153.

c. Get them connected: Another key to making a successful ‘handoff’ is getting students connected with Christians at the Universities they will be attending—long before they get on campus.

Some suggestions:

- * Invite a campus ministry group to present a program on Uni life to you students in their final term in high school. This exposes them to Christian university students and gives them a perspective on campus life.
- * Arrange to visit a large meeting of a campus ministry.
- * As students narrow their choices of universities to attend, encourage them to look into what campus ministries are, to find out more about the spiritual opportunities available.
- * If they’re moving away from home, help them explore which local churches may offer strong Christian programs. If possible-visit good local churches near their campus and make a connection with someone on staff who could contact them when they arrive in the area.
- * Create a special ‘school leavers church service and commissioning’ (e.g. Senior Sunday)
 - Inviting seniors to share where they’re headed and share stories of their growth in faith over the years
 - Allow seniors to lead the service and other aspects of the service
 - Incorporate a special time of prayer for exiting students
 - Involve parents by inviting some of them to pray

2:4 Transitioning: 7 characteristics of college/uni friendly churches:

The team at ‘Think Orange’ have done a great deal of research and thinking into the area of youth transition and retention, they subsequently devised 7 core characteristics common to church ministries that are retaining students from high school through the college/university years:

*“There are churches that truly engage college-age people. These churches have a structure that’s strategic, beyond a separate service. They’ve developed a **lifelong discipleship process** by **intentionally connecting people of all generations**. Because college-age people stay connected to the people in the church, the outcome is a **continuous flow of growing believers**”²⁴²*

These churches tended to embrace these 7 core characteristics:

1. Leaders place a high priority on *cross-generational* relationships
2. Leaders cultivate a heart in older mature believers for *discipleship of younger believers* and they hold them to this standard (2Tim 2:2, Titus 2:3-4)
3. Student ministry leaders express *respect for older adults* in the church. There’s *mutual respect between the ministers* of children and youth, and ministers working with the adult congregation
4. No leader is on an island. All leaders across the varied ‘silo’ ministries view themselves as a small part in the *lifelong discipleship* of individuals
5. Leaders *work alongside parents*, and strategically do so from the nursery through the college-age years

²⁴² Chuck Bomar: Think Orange: Concentrate 9.3.

6. College-age individuals have a leader who works in an *assimilation role* to connect college-age people with more experienced believers

7. College-age individuals have a leader who understands the search for identity, intimacy, meaning, pleasure, and truth during the college-age years and is able to disciple people toward *biblically mature conclusions* in each area.

3. Create rites of passage:

As mentioned in 2:5, ensuring effective transition, retention and re-enforcing faith commitment means children; teenagers and young adults today need more public faith engagement (such as confirmation, inclusion in praying, serving and bible reading in church) as well as meaningful 'rites of passage'.

Powell, Griffin and Crawford believe that establishing certain 'transition rituals' can be a helpful mechanism for helping children, teens and young adults (and their community of faith) manage change and socially and psychologically recognize its importance:

"...Graduation from high school may not mark the end of adolescence, but rituals that confer "adult status" – or at least acknowledge emerging adulthood – spur the process of taking on an adult identity within the community. Retreats, parent-child experiences, or special worship rituals can communicate that a child is entering into adolescence, and that an adolescent is entering adulthood. The church family must then recognize that young person's new status...What practice could you initiate that would say, "We celebrate that you have come to this point of transition, and we will continue to walk with you as you face the challenges of your journey"?" ²⁴³

Some suggestions made were:

- * Special camps that mark the end of one stage and entry to another.
- * Special celebration services at church involving the children, teens or young adults
- * Creating a series of 'closure' events in the 4th term of a graduating year, followed by a series of 'welcome' events into the new

4. Provide threefold support and 'strategic flow': ²⁴⁴

Research suggested that the **threefold** strand of **parents**, the **church** and older **adult mentors** all have a critical and strategic place to play in helping youth through the difficult transition process.

4.1 Parents:

Research found that contact with parents, whether by phone, email or text, is strongly related to practical and emotional adjustment to college/uni. This was true regardless of who made the contact. ²⁴⁵

Given the research indicating that the first two weeks set the trajectory for the rest of college, parents can help their teenager create a '*first two-week plan*' as a road map to start their journey.

E.g.

- When will they go to church?
- When will they study?
- When will they connect with family?
- What will they do on the first weekend they are away?

²⁴³ Sticky Faith: Youth Worker ed. P 62f.

²⁴⁴ The phrase- 'strategic flow' was first coined by Ken Moser in '*Changing The World Through Effective Youth Ministry*'. Moser believes it's critical for a ministry to develop strategic transitions, bridges or 'flow' of youth from younger to older groups and life stages p. 9, 36.

²⁴⁵ Sticky Faith: p.154.

Though free to deviate from the plan, at least the questions and potential strategies have been discussed and begun to be thought through.

Parents can also help prepare their child by:

- * Actively nurturing and encouraging healthy independence in the lead up to high school graduation. A healthy leaving-home transition has a reasonably good balance between connection and independence. The parents' capacity to pull back from responsibility for their grown child's life, and forge a more adult relationship of mutual interest, is critical to the way a young person manages this transition.²⁴⁶
- * Helping their young adult to research potential new churches & campus ministries
- * By visiting local campus churches or on- campus ministries before graduation
- * Openly talking about spiritual life and life after high school
- * Helping their child to grieve losses and change
- * Talking about money and managing money
- * Talking about how they might navigate old friendships, which change quickly after high school
- * Processing their own 'empty nest' feelings as parents and personally dealing with change, beginning to 'loosen the ties' and learning to trust God with their child
- * Celebrating some "lasts" together. The mini-rituals help closure for the child and the family
- * Discuss with them how they might want to spend the last few weeks before their new adventure so that they can work out time with friends and family that they might need
- * Helping their child deal with the experience of loss. Powell and Clark list 6 losses we can help teenagers grieve; material, relationship, loss of a dream (not getting into the course they wanted), functional, role and systemic loss (i.e. loss of their network of supportive relationships)²⁴⁷

4:2 Adult mentors:

Research suggested that intergenerational mentors could help by continuing to keep contact with teenagers post high school. Research indicated that contact with at least one adult from the congregation *outside* the youth ministry during the first semester of college is linked with the likelihood of stickier faith.²⁴⁸ Hearing from an adult mentor from their home church, whether by text, email or phone helped students take their faith to college with them, and that contact would continue to make a difference three years later. Research suggests that for greatest effect, these intergenerational mentor relationships are best started long before teenagers exit a church.

4:3 The church:

Moser believes it's critical for a youth ministry to develop strategic transitions, bridges or 'flow', of youth from younger to older groups and stages. Flow is where a successful younger group can lead to the development of an older group:

²⁴⁶ Growing Yourself Up: p. 54.

²⁴⁷ Sticky Faith: p. 164.

²⁴⁸ Sticky Faith: p.100 & 178.

“Flow is simply creating a system where a group that is well run will move up (or flow on) to the next stage group (some prefer to use the term ‘bridging’)... In a perfect world, there would be a vibrant Sunday school from which children would flow into a junior high group; that could lead into a senior high group and then move on to an 18+/university group...the combination of flow and reaching out through evangelism is the great double barrel of growth. The simple and most effective rule for numerical growth is to keep what you’ve got!” ²⁴⁹

In a perfect world, there would be a Sunday school from which children would flow into a junior high group; that could lead into a senior group and then move on to an 18+/university group, the older group supplying leaders to keep the whole thing going.

One of the signs of a successful ministry is that there is a successful transition from younger group to older group. ²⁵⁰ Not only that, but a sign of a successful youth ministry is also if the group following on from the previous one is larger than its predecessor as it grows through flow and evangelism.

Moser suggests the following as ways to bridge transition and create flow: ²⁵¹

- a. Having *leaders* move up with kids for a time to aid transition to the next stage
- b. Ensuring ‘flow’ at *the right time*: making the transition a few months before the end of the leaving year so that momentum is not lost over summer
- c. *Preparing kids beforehand*: priming them about the group they’re moving up to and having future leaders visit them in their current group. Enabling kids to visit/observe the group meeting they’re moving on to
- d. *Preparing the group* they’re transitioning to: helping them be excited about change and welcoming new members, encouraging them to take responsibility for the newer members coming through
- e. *Beware of program ‘shock’*: where there may be a clash of styles between the previous group and the one they’re transitioning to (especially if that is church)

One pastor has suggested that what’s needed to ease the difficult transition process is ‘*college friendly churches*’, that people cannot become spiritually mature unless they stay *intimately connected* to other believers, therefore we must strategically develop church structures that promote intimate connection. The first step is making sure our structures support people through *all the life stages*. ²⁵²

This pastor suggests that churches that truly engage college-age people have a structure that’s strategic beyond just creating a separate service; they’ve developed a *lifelong discipleship process* by intentionally *connecting people of all generations*. These churches embrace at least seven crucial characteristics:

1. Leaders place a high priority on *cross-generational relationships*
2. Leaders cultivate a heart in older mature believers for *discipleship* of younger believers, and *hold them to the standard* (2Tim 2:2, Tit 2:3-4)

²⁴⁹ Changing The World: p.36.

²⁵⁰ Changing The World: p.9.

²⁵¹ Changing The World: p.38f.

²⁵² The Pastors belief is that some leaders have attempted to build a bridge for this disconnection by developing another church service. But even if this attracts hundreds of college-age people, it doesn’t necessarily solve the core problem. From a college-age student’s perspective, this approach could only just contribute to further disconnection. This model actually exposes the differences between people, not the similarities. Therefore, in order for true connection to take place another approach is needed. Think Orange: 9.3.

3. Student ministry leaders *express respect* for older adults in church. There is mutual respect between ministers of children and ministers who work with the adult congregation
4. No leader is on an island. They view themselves as a small part in the *lifelong discipleship* of people
5. Leaders *work alongside parents* and strategically do so from the nursery through the college-age years
6. College-age individuals have a leader who works in an *assimilation role* to connect college-age people with more experienced believers
7. College-age individuals have a leader who understands the search for identity, intimacy, meaning, pleasure, and truth during the college years and is able to disciple people toward *biblically mature conclusions* in each area

Research also suggests recognising and celebrating critical of 'rite of passage' moments by parents, adult mentors and churches alike are powerful opportunities to aid the transition process and guide teenagers and young adults into the next phase of life, ministry and maturity.²⁵³

5. Develop a 'birth to graduation' philosophy:

The Orange-ology philosophy considers transitions to be critical moments for children, teenagers and young adults. One of the 5 essentials in the Orange philosophy and methodology is to manage those critical transition points by integrating 'Family Ministry' across the church, including through to the *young adult years of 18-25*. The aim is to avoid creating competing programmes and to create a single integrated ministry approach from '*birth to graduation*'.²⁵⁴

By using one integrated strategy and curriculum the aim is not only to simplify the church program and calendar, but also to plan for the crucial 'transition' stages from childhood to teenager, teenager to college student. The Orange integrated curriculum extends to the age of 25, with specially prepared materials targeting key transition issues and concerns, thereby encompassing the broader scope of 'youth and young adults ministry' in one seamless program of approach.²⁵⁵

Conclusion:

Moments of change and transition are significant life events for anyone, but especially for children, teenagers and young adults. Managed poorly, these events not only generate significant loss in social momentum, exacerbate emotional uncertainty and change anxiety, but for many, lack of '*transitional programmatic intentionality*' on our part can potentially lead to - spiritual disorientation, disengagement from church life, and for some even loss of faith for individuals.

This paper has been an attempt to examine the factors surrounding youth drop out and disengagement as it relates to a failure to adequately address important life transitions, and to propose possible ways forward in developing and executing a more effective means of - *transitional programmatic intentionality* within our church ministries.

²⁵³ Note this article: <http://stickyfaith.org/articles/through-the-zone>

²⁵⁴ It's interesting to note that Moser also defines 'youth' as the period just before the teens through to graduation at 21 or 22. Changing The World: p.9.

²⁵⁵ The book 'Think Orange' also raises good ideas on transitioning (note particularly the sections 9.2 & 9.3). The Orange website also provides full resources (notably -XP3 college) particularly to help the transition process from high school to college, with '*Next Generation Guides*' for mentors and small group leaders. See: <http://stickyfaith.org/student-curriculum>. Also see: <http://www.covchurch.org/resources/real-life-field-guide/>. Sticky Faith also lists several ideas as well as online resources they've prepared in helping to improve transitioning processes. P.166f.

Written by Sarie King

The six core strategies proposed were: the need for our ministries to develop greater *programmatic intentionality* in this area, ensure a *unifying ministry theology* and *philosophy* across all congregations and ministries, to develop a clear *disciple-making strategy* that spans all generations, engage in greater *partnership with parents*, proactively foster *intergenerational relationships*, and have specific practical strategies in place to *equip, manage and prepare* our children, youth and young adults for moments of transition.

We hope you find this research paper helpful and warmly welcome your comments feedback through our website: effectiveministry.org.

- APPENDIX -

Perspectives on Family Ministry: 3 Views:

Timothy P. Jones (ed): ²⁵⁶

Thesis: Families must resume their role as the primary disciplers of children:

Jones belief is that the missing ingredient in the discipleship of children today is the family. The church has often operated as the primary means of spiritual development of youth and children, and therefore parents have gradually relinquished their role. ²⁵⁷

The book adheres to the scriptural belief that parents (and especially fathers) should be the primary discipleship-makers of children, and that the church should therefore rethink and redevelop its 'family ministry' to support, encourage and foster that role.

Jones goes on to make the case that every church is called to some form of family ministry. ²⁵⁸ That although there's no widespread agreement on what family ministry should look like — what's meant by true "family ministry" isn't simply one more program, but a fundamentally different way of doing church, it requires refocusing '*every church process*' to engage *parents* in the process of discipling their children. ²⁵⁹

Jones defines 'family ministry' as the following:

"The process of intentionally and persistently realigning a congregation's proclamation and practices so that parents are acknowledged, trained, and held accountable as the persons primarily responsible for the discipleship of their children." ²⁶⁰

Aim:

Jones argues that most children's/youth ministry models operate on the 'programmatic ministry model' where ministries are organized around separate 'silos' with little consistent intergenerational interaction. Family Ministry', when it exists is just one more program. Jones aims to help individuals and churches think through family ministry, firstly by presenting the historical contexts and foundations for family ministry and then outlining three of the most prominent models of family oriented models seeking to reverse this trend. ²⁶¹

All 3 models/philosophies/methodologies outlined share the same values but approach the process differently. Each claim to base their approach on scripture, all three aim to draw the home and the church into a life-transforming partnership.

²⁵⁶ Timothy P. Jones: Perspectives on family Ministry: 3 Views: (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009).

²⁵⁷ On page 16, Jones references a Nationwide Barna Study conducted in 2003 indicating parents had largely given over the responsibility for the spiritual nurture and development of their children to the church, a responsibility that was impossible for the church to achieve alone - "*Unfortunately no matter how hard the church tries, it's incapable of bringing a child to complete spiritual maturity; that is the job of the family. The more willing churches are to play the co-dependent role in this drama, the less likely we are to see spiritually healthy families and a generation of young people who grow into mature believers*" (Parents Accept Responsibility for their Child's Spiritual Development but Struggle with Effectiveness) <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/120-parents-accept-responsibility-for-their-childs-spiritual-development-but-struggle-with-effectiveness>

²⁵⁸ Perspectives: p.46.

²⁵⁹ Perspectives: p.41.

²⁶⁰ Perspectives: p.40.

²⁶¹ All three philosophies would agree that - "*the primary training ground for discipleship and spiritual formation is the nuclear family rather than the local church.*" All three also agree on three basic assumptions: (1) God has called parents (and especially fathers) to take personal responsibility for the Christian formation of their children; (2) Scripture is the supreme and sufficient standard for how to do ministry; and (3) the generations need one another. However, each system maintains distinct perspectives on philosophical and methodological matters. Perspectives: p.46-47.

The three approaches are identified as - *family integrated, family-based* and *family-equipping*:

(a) The Family integrated model:

The family-integrated (or family-driven, family discipleship) model is the most radical and is distinguished by its insistence of ‘integration’ as an ecclesiological principle...it eliminates all age-segregated, peer-oriented ministry. Nearly all programs and events are ‘*multigenerational*’ with the delivery method of discipleship primarily in and through the home, with parents the primary disciple-makers, and families seeking to evangelize other families through hospitality evangelism in the home.²⁶²

This model considers the purpose of the church is to equip parents (and primarily fathers) to evangelize and disciple their children and to equip families to evangelize other families: *“Our church has no youth ministers, children’s ministers, or nursery. We do not divide families into component parts. We do not separate the mature women from the young teenage girls who need their guidance. We do not separate the toddler from his parents during worship. In fact, we don’t even do it in Bible study. We see the church as a family of families”.*²⁶³

(b) The family-based ‘philosophy’:

Here, the children’s programmatic structure remains unchanged, but the key is a philosophical or ‘focus’ shift, where programs are refocused and events, as well as ‘*intergenerational curriculum,*’ are utilized within the already existing structures. They are not activity based, nor uni-generational, but retain age-segregation for missional reasons.²⁶⁴

The expectation is that every ministry will intentionally include intergenerational, multigenerational and family-focused events, contact and mentoring, drawing families and generations together and actively encourage parents’ engagement in the discipleship process.²⁶⁵

Their aim is to equip Christian parents to become primary disciplers and to *partner intentionally* and *dynamically* with families in the discipleship process.²⁶⁶ *“We are not suggesting a radical change in programming. What we are suggesting is a fresh mindset—parents and family are crucial to faith development in every area of a ministry’s program”.*²⁶⁷

(c) The family equipping model:

This model is a hybrid, representing middle ground between the two. It operates on the belief that the path of spiritual formation is built on the foundation of strong families (with parents the primary disciple-makers) and strong faith communities working together i.e. *discipleship through*

²⁶² Perspectives: p.42f.

²⁶³ Perspectives: p.55.

²⁶⁴ Family-based philosophy believes that age-organized programs function, not only to address cultural ills in relevant and practical ways, but more importantly, as a vital missiological tool to reach the hearts of those that might otherwise not hear the gospel. Family based churches recognize the evangelistic opportunity of the church extends beyond the doors of Christian homes p.107 & 114-116.

²⁶⁵ The belief here is that something is seriously wrong if all mentors of children and youth are only within the twenty-something age bracket. The belief is that the Bible couches discipleship in multigenerational terms (Titus 2:1-8), suggesting that a network of grandparents, empty nesters, young couples, college students, single parents and widowers provide the best context for discipleship outside an intact family unit p.109.

²⁶⁶ Perspectives: p.43 & 106.

²⁶⁷ Family-based ministries do not see themselves so much as a ministry ‘model’ but a philosophy of ministry. The two core values undergirding this philosophy being flexibility to operate across different church cultures, and focus balance on both church and unchurched family units p.98.

*partnership.*²⁶⁸ Each aspect of congregational life is reconstructed to consciously ‘co-champion’ the church’s ministry and the parent’s responsibility.²⁶⁹

Age-segregated ministries remain but their aim is to find ways to use those ministries to train, involve, and equip parents. A high premium is placed on *intergenerational* interaction: “*Family-equipping churches retain some age-organized ministries but restructure the congregation to partner with parents at every level of ministry so that parents are acknowledged, equipped, and held accountable for the discipleship of their children*”.²⁷⁰

Rather an additional ministry – this particular model is a philosophy of ministry that shapes the way every *ministry* within the church relates to families.

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²⁶⁸ Perspectives: p.144.

²⁶⁹ Strother uses the term ‘emerging generations’ to describe the emphasis given to the restructure process. Indicating that children and youth are not only vital for the future church but also the present, and as such they should be called to responsibility and maturity as full participants in the community of faith p.144.

²⁷⁰ The aim is twofold: 1. Engage and equip parents as the primary disciplers 2. Partner with parents to develop a definite plan for their children’s Christian formation. p.145.

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YOUTH & CHILDREN'S MINISTRY - FIELD QUESTIONNAIRE -

* Note: the language references were modified for separate youth and children's documents.

Basic Data:

Name:

Church:

Role:

Length of time in role:

F/T or P/T capacity:

What prior training have you had for the role:

Number of years experience in youth ministry:

Number of assisting staff: volunteers:

How long has the youth ministry been running at the church:

How many youth in the *entire* program:(i.e. church, group time, other)

Junior High: (Please indicate if your junior youth numbers start at yr 6)

Senior High:

How does this compare to 5yrs previous: remained static: increased by %: declined by %:

Percentage of youth in *non-Sunday* activities from churched or unchurched families:

(Please indicate if your junior youth numbers start at yr 6)

Junior High: % churched % unchurched

Senior High: % churched % unchurched

What percentage of youth participating only *on Sundays* are:

(Please indicate if your junior youth numbers start at yr. 6)

Junior High: % churched % unchurched

Senior High: % churched % unchurched

How long does the youth group meet for each week:

List the key activities that take up the main meeting time & the typical time percentage given to each activity:

Ministry Methodology:

Role & Philosophy:

1. Describe the main *functions* of *your role* in relation to the youth ministry:

2. Describe the *key functions* of those who may *assist* you in the ministry:

3. What is your particular *philosophy* or *model* of youth ministry?
(E.g. what takes core focal priority- discipling/mission/outreach/community life/other? etc.)

4. Are there any differences between how *you* perceive your role/function/ philosophy of youth ministry and that of:
 - a. The Minister:

 - b. The congregation:

5. What are the core *Biblical principles* (if any) that drive your particular philosophy of youth ministry?

6. What *core strategies* are in place to implement that philosophy?

7. How does your philosophy of youth ministry fit with:
 - a. The philosophy of *children's ministry* in your church?

 - b. The philosophy of *young adults* and *family* ministry of the church?

8. What key *texts/people* have most influenced or shaped your particular philosophy of youth ministry?

Vision and Implementation:

9. Was the ministry you came into a '*start-up*' or *pre-established* one?
 - a. If a '**start-up**': what specific strategies were implemented to *begin* the ministry?

 - b. What specific strategies were implemented to then *consolidate* the ministry?

 - c. If a '**pre-established**' ministry: what *strategy changes* have you made (if any)?

 - d. Why were those changes made?

10. Who sets the *vision* of the youth ministry? And...
 - a. How does that vision relate to the *children's ministry* vision at the church?

 - b. How does that vision relate to the *overall vision* strategy of the church?

11. List of *core structures* of the ministry? (i.e. group time? church? holiday? camps? scripture? other?)

12. How does the church envision the youth ministry's *function* in relation to *parents and families*?
 - a. In regard to believers:

 - b. In regard to unbelievers:

13. What particular strategies are in place to engage or attract *unchurched youth* to the ministry?

14. How does the church see its relationship/role to *local schools*?

15. What *percentage flow on* (if any) do you see from:

- a. Scripture in schools to Youth group?
- b. Scripture in schools to church?
- c. Youth group to church?
- d. Parents of youth to church?
- e. Other?

Intergenerationality, Growth and Transitions:

16. Is the ministry developed around an *age/stage-based* structure or with an *intergenerational mix*?

17. Is there any focus on developing or fostering '*inter-generationality*' in the way the youth ministry is executed?

a. If so, what *age breadth*?

b. *How* is it done?

18. Are there any specific mechanisms in place to measure *spiritual growth or understanding*?

If so, what?

19. Are there any '*transition*' mechanisms in place for moving participants from youth to adult programs?

a. On average, how many participants make *successful* transition from youth to adult program?

b. What *follow-up* (if any) is given to youth who *fail* to transition?

Leadership Selection, Recruiting and Training:

20. How are leaders/volunteers *recruited*?

a. By *whom*?

b. What are the selection criteria?

21. What *training, coaching or mentoring* is offered to lay leaders?

22. What does the training *encompass*?

Education and Communication:

23. What (if any) *input/education/communication* given to the *parents* of youth:

a. In regard to the youth program and methodology

b. In regard to youth issues/parenting

c. Other?

24. What (if any) *input/education/communication* regarding the vision of the youth ministry is given to the *broader church community*:

Support and Resourcing:

25. What action do you take to keep yourself supported, refreshed and current in the area of youth ministry? (E.g. Youth networks/peer groups/contact with Youthworks/other?)

26. What *support* is given to the youth ministry staff & leadership *from the church*?

27. Are any other members of the *staff ministry team* involved in any aspect of the ministry?

If so, in what capacity?

28. What *resourcing* is given to the ministry?

Feedback and Challenges:

29. What (if any) *evaluation* or *feedback* mechanisms are in place?

a. In regard to the program:

b. In regard to your leadership:

c. In regard to volunteers:

30. In your opinion, what are the particular *challenges* facing:

a. Youth ministry today:

b. Youth ministers:

Other:

31. Any other thoughts/comments?

- THANKS -

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