



YOUTH MINISTRY ASSESSMENT REPORT

**Mt Sylvan United Methodist Church
Durham, NC
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BACKGROUND

Mt. Sylvan United Methodist Church is located on the northern end of Durham, North Carolina and is a part of the Durham District of the North Carolina Conference. The city of Durham has a population of 228,330 (according to the US Census Bureau of 2010) and a long history stretching back to the late 1700's, surviving the Revolutionary and Civil Wars as well as the Great Depression. The tobacco industry attributed to growth in Durham in the 1800s and the first half of the 1900s. Major employers in Durham today are Duke University and companies in the Research Triangle Park.

HISTORY OF MT. SYLVAN UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

For more than a century and a quarter, Mt Sylvan United Methodist Church has been "characterized by faithfulness and service, fellowship and outreach." Since the first brush arbor meetings took place in 1883, the church has navigated joys and the challenges unique to its place and calling in the Durham community. The church has known both the joy of planned expansion and the challenge of unexpected trials—the joy of expanding facilities and the loss of the church to fire in 1939. Yet through these challenges, the church has emerged as a community, which is called "to be disciples making disciples." The current facility includes ample space for worship and Christian education, including a sanctuary and church office space (2002), chapel, kitchen, Sunday School classrooms, and a preschool with 99 children enrolled.

Mt Sylvan's calling to "be disciples making disciples" takes shape in concrete ways both locally and abroad. This emphasis continues today through the church's preschool, ongoing children's Sunday School, and its hiring of a full-time youth ministry staff person in 2009. Both youth and adult members describe Mt Sylvan as "welcoming," "like family," and "caring." When asked to describe the church, one youth said the church was "blessed with a community of disciples of Christ who are very qualified to equip others." Through comments such as these, it becomes clear that Mt Sylvan does not exist as an insular, self-concerned body, but rather seeks to use its gifts in cooperation with its mission to northern Durham and the surrounding community. Over the years, Mt Sylvan UMC has been a place where people form deep connections with each other while growing in their faith.

Mt. Sylvan UMC currently has 900 people on the church roll, and on an average week 300 people attend either the 8:30 a.m. traditional or the 11:00 a.m. contemporary Sunday morning worship service. Currently the Pastor of Congregational Life leads the pastoral staff which includes a Pastor of Family Life, Pastor of Worship Life, and Pastor of Student Life. A part-time



Business Administrator, part-time Office Administrator, and (more than full-time ☺) volunteer Church Treasurer support the pastoral staff.

Currently, approximately 60 6th through 12th graders populate the church rolls, and throughout the course of a typical week, an estimated 45 youth participate in some aspect of church life. These aspects of church life include Sunday morning worship services, Sunday night youth group, Monday and Tuesday night small groups, youth choir, and liturgical dance. Youth also assist with children's Sunday School and weekly music program, the church praise team, and in the kitchen. In addition to these weekly offerings, youth also participate in a variety of mission activities and other opportunities for spiritual formation, including SERVE Durham (a local mission trip with other churches), the Lake J Summer Retreat, Pilgrimage, an annual youth led worship service, and the Wreck-Nite Kick Off. Youth enthusiastically raised funds last year through pumpkin sales, and in the coming year, they hope to embark on an international mission trip of some kind. Currently, seventeen adult volunteers bless the congregation by assisting with the youth ministry. These volunteers assist with Sunday evening youth meetings, small groups, youth trips, and fundraisers. In addition to the efforts of the Pastor of Student Life and the volunteers, the Pastor of Worship Life leads the youth choir and the praise team, and the Pastor of Family Life coordinates Confirmation for middle school students during the Lenten season.

Over the past thirteen years, the youth ministry at Mt. Sylvan has been through a variety of seasons and seen six staff people with youth ministry responsibilities come and go. During these various seasons, the youth ministry has known times of stability and growth, but it has also seen times of confusion and decline. The past five years have brought increased stability to the youth ministry, including the current Pastor of Student Life and his predecessor. Current young people in the congregation describe the current Pastor of Student Life as "able to teach in a way that connects with youth," "fun," "relational," "comfortable in a variety of situations," and "easy to talk to."

Mt. Sylvan United Methodist Church currently has a budget of \$643,000 for the 2011 church year. The youth ministry has a budget of \$54,176 which includes the program budget, the salary for the Pastor of Student Life, and a portion of the salaries of the Pastor of Family Life and the Pastor of Worship Life.

Youth Ministry Architects was invited by the Pastor of Congregational Life to do an initial assessment of the youth ministry at Mt. Sylvan and to make recommendations about how it might move strategically forward. We met with 52 individuals, (16 youth and 36 adults) in 10 focus groups or one-on-one meetings. What follows are the findings gleaned from those conversations along with recommendations and a proposed timeline for the future.

YOUTH MINISTRY IN CONTEXT

One lens we like to use for understanding youth ministry is the idea of the "three rents." Youth ministries that "pay these rents" tend to have much greater freedom to be creative, take risks, and experiment with innovative ideas.

It has been our experience that though these three rents, in and of themselves, do not ensure an effective or faithful ministry, they are often the most immediate evaluation tools used by youth, parents, staff and the congregation at large. Those youth ministries that fail to pay these



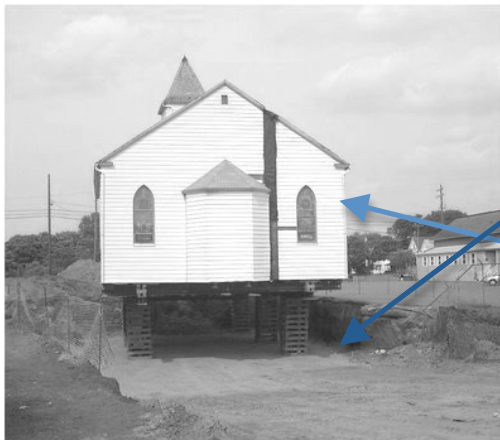
rents often find themselves mired in distrust, second-guessing and discouragement. We have calculated these rents to the best of our ability in the absence of detailed attendance records.

Rent #1: NUMBERS—A significant percentage of youth need to be participating visibly in some aspect of the church’s ministry. It will be important for a target participation number to be clearly agreed on by the Administrative Council, youth ministry leadership and staff. Ironically, when target numbers are not established, youth ministries are typically more likely to be judged by numbers than if the target numbers are clearly established.

Rent #2: PROGRAMS—In order to “earn the right” to experiment with changes, youth leadership will need to provide the church with a few visible, effective programs that give youth, parents, leaders and staff “something to talk about.”

Rent #3: ENTHUSIASM—It will be necessary to establish a joyful, expectant culture among the active youth and parents for the benefit of the rest of the youth and congregation. A climate of enthusiasm will be essential to building trust with the leadership of the church and the parents.

As the leadership of this ministry develops its long-range vision, it will simultaneously need to be attentive to these “three rents.” In this sense, Mt Sylvan’s youth ministry faces parallel challenges:



1. Laying the Foundation: Building a foundation and infrastructure that will ensure the ministries’ *future* effectiveness, and at the same time,
2. Continuing to Worship on Stilts: Maintaining the *current* ministry in a way that builds the enthusiasm of youth, families, staff and the church at large.

As the youth ministry leadership steps into this parallel process, five rules of thumb – or what we call “ministry norms” – will be helpful to keep in mind:

- 1) **\$1000 a Kid**—In 2011, Mt. Sylvan UMC is investing approximately \$54,176 in the youth ministry, including \$5000 for the program budget and \$49,176 toward staff salaries (the Pastor of Student Life’s salary and a percentage of the Pastor of Family Life and Pastor of Worship Life’s salaries relevant to the percentage of their time given to the youth ministry weekly). Given this amount, Mt Sylvan is financially resourced to support a youth program of approximately 54 youth. It is reported that approximately 45 youth are involved on a weekly basis, which would suggest the youth ministry has some room for growth. However a true amount of financial investment is difficult to determine because there are no attendance records to reflect how many youth are currently being served.



- 2) **1 Full-Time Staff Person for Every 50 Youth**—In the current configuration there is 1.2 full time staff equivalent focusing on youth ministry (100% of the Pastor of Student Life's time; 12.5% of the Pastor of Worship Life's time; and 7.5% of the Pastor of Family Life's time). That means Mt. Sylvan has the capacity to sustain the engagement of 60 youth on a weekly basis. According to this rule of thumb, Mt Sylvan has the potential to sustain larger numbers of youth given current levels of staffing.
- 3) **1 Adult for Every 5 Youth**— We like to think in terms of “spans of care,” recognizing that, realistically, most volunteers cannot effectively oversee the church's Christian nurture of more than about five youth on an ongoing basis. With 17 volunteers weekly, Mt Sylvan has the capacity to sustain 85 youth on a weekly basis (the current number is 45). According to this rule of thumb, there is some room for growth.
- 4) **10% of the Worshiping Congregation**—In a typical church, the size of the youth ministry tends to settle at a number that is around 10% of the worshiping congregation. With an average worship attendance of 300, we would expect to see around 30 youth regularly participating in some aspect of the church's ministry each week. When asked about the number of youth participating in some aspect of the church's ministry, 45 was the number reported. Given this figure, the youth ministry is performing above capacity. However, the absence of attendance records presents a challenge here as well.
- 5) **20% Ceiling**—We have also discovered that in many churches, the youth ministry has difficulty growing beyond a level that equals 20% of the weekly worshiping congregation. Only those youth ministries that are “relentlessly simple” seem to be able to break beyond this 20% level. Mt Sylvan might keep in mind, then, that the expected ceiling for this youth ministry is around 60 youth. The road to that level of participation is dependent on increased staffing, volunteers and budget.

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE YOUTH STAFF

When a ministry is based solely on the giftedness of a single staff person, instability is a predictable result. We have found that the most stable approach to staffing a ministry, particularly in the early stages of a rebuild, is to build a staff of three *different* kinds of people:

- **The Architect:** A person or organization that designs the building plan and ensures that building is done in compliance with the agreed-upon plan.
- **The Construction Foreman:** A person who manages the flow and sequencing of work, manages the building process according to the agreed-upon blueprint, and ensures that the appropriate number of “laborers” is in place for each stage of the project.
- **The Laborers:** Those people charged with specific gifts and responsibilities for particular aspects of the work. In youth ministry, a laborer might have particular skills in relating to youth, or particular skills in planning and managing events, or particular skills in teaching.

Many churches hire, as their lead youth director, someone who may have gifts in a single area--for example, working with youth, managing a facility--but who simply doesn't have the experience base or the skill set to oversee the complex components of a ministry of 50 or more youth. The result in these situations can be a pattern of unrealistic expectations for the staff, which can lead to "scapegoating," particularly in settings in which a sustainable infrastructure for ministry has not been established.



ASSETS

Strengths to protect in the current youth ministry

The Shared Value in the Priority of Youth Ministry: The fact that over 50 youth and adults participated in focus groups, taking time to share their input about the youth ministry, gives undeniable evidence of a broad based eagerness to build a thriving youth ministry at Mt. Sylvan UMC.

The church's willingness to invest in the youth ministry is clear via:

1. The hiring of a full time youth director.
2. A dedicated youth room with colorful walls, decorated ceiling tiles with t-shirts from past years, and ample seating areas.
3. The initiation of this assessment process to provide the church with a strategic plan for building on current momentum and progressing toward a youth ministry with long-term sustainability.

All these factors contribute to a climate that says youth and their families are highly valued and that their growth in faith is a high priority for the Mt Sylvan church family.

Pastor of Student Life: During his first two years, the youth director has been highly effective at infusing energy and enthusiasm into the youth group. Described as "fun," his relational gifts have won him a place in the inner circle of the lives of many of the youth and their families and connected them to the life of the church. Youth also expressed appreciation for his ability to be serious with them. One youth said, "Not only can he hang out with every personality, he can get down and get serious." Another said, "Nate knows when to turn off the craziness and get serious." Parents and youth alike echoed the same sentiment: "Nate does wonders for the youth group." Parent after parent expressed amazement and gratitude that he has been able to attend so many youth sporting events and spend time chatting either through text messages or on line with their kids on a regular basis. His commitment to be involved in the personal lives of the youth is a defining characteristic of his ministry.

Other comments from focus group participants included:

- He is energy all the time.
- Our boys love him and respect him. He has been very good to our boys. When our son was going through some personal drama, he helped him work through that.
- He knows how to handle people. He knows how to engage in conversations.
- He knows how to teach a lesson in a youthful way.

Pastoral Staff: Over and over again, focus group participants expressed immense gratitude for the character, integrity, maturity, love for God, giftedness and effectiveness of the entire pastoral staff of Mt. Sylvan.

Pastor of Congregational Life:

- Tom does feel like a father to me.



- If you need to talk to him, he's there.
- We get good support from Tom.

Pastor of Family Life:

- I love Jessie.
- She's very good at being caring.
- She likes talking to everybody.

Pastor of Worship Life:

- Once you become a part of her life you won't get left out of her life.
- She's like a mother figure to me.
- She's super friendly and super nice.

Willingness to Step to the Plate: Many in focus groups spoke with confidence about the church's ability and willingness to support the youth and the youth ministry. Repeatedly, we heard that church members are willing to contribute their time, talents and resources in any way necessary. The decision to hire a full-time staff person for youth ministry two years ago communicated a clear message that there is undeniable "institutional energy" around building a thriving youth ministry.

There is a core group of parents who desperately want their children to have a positive church experience throughout their middle school and high school years. However there does not seem to be an organized system for tapping into the enthusiasm and energy of parents of youth. However, once such a system is in place, there are plenty of parents who are ready, willing, and able to make an impact on youth ministry.

Small Groups: Many youth named their small groups as the highlight of their experience at Mt. Sylvan. Youth commented: "Small group helps me prepare for the rest of the week." "It's a good refresher in the week." "Small group kind of gets you back on track." One mother noted, "My son is more able to verbalize in that setting." Though not every small group has succeeded in engaging youth at a significant spiritual level, the youth ministry has enjoyed a much higher than normal success rate in these first experiments with small group ministry.

Special Event Programming/Appetite for Missions: The youth involved in the focus groups were quick to name "Lake J" as their favorite part of the youth ministry. The youth reflected their obvious enthusiasm by saying things like "Lake J is one of the most meaningful trips" and "it grounds us." During one focus group, a number of youth got caught up sharing their first Lake J memories. Although some parents and many youth commented that the cost of the trips could, for some, be limiting, those who were able to attend received the opportunity to share experiences that bonded them at a deeper level. Many youth were interested in having more trips, specifically more mission trips.

SERVE Durham was also mentioned as a favorite part of the youth ministry. It's clear that the youth and adults who participated in SERVE last year were deeply impacted by the experience and are looking forward to it again this summer. Youth consistently named SERVE Durham and Lake J as the best thing about the youth ministry. "SERVE Durham helps people realize that real problems are in our own backyard. We don't have to go somewhere else."



Extraordinary Volunteer Leaders: Quite a number of the youth ministry volunteers are dearly loved and appreciated by the youth and parents. Though not all adult leaders connect with all youth, there seems to be a wide variety of available, engaging adults to serve as mentors to the youth who are currently active in the program. Youth said,

- Tim is the coolest guy ever.
- Our counselors are saints.
- Jane was like a mother to me.
- Jane took care of me when I was sick. She took care of me like my mom would.
- The best part about our youth ministry is the counselors!

A strong core of volunteers has stuck with the youth ministry through multiple transitions and has no intention of stepping back anytime soon. Leaders said things like, “I love working with the youth” and “You learn so much from the kids when you're out with them. They can teach you pretty amazing things.”

In addition, some of the parents indicated a desire “to be asked” to help out the youth ministry in some way. There is a potential pool of new volunteers waiting to become engaged.

Youth Leadership: Some of the high school youth expressed eagerness about making the youth leadership team more than a monthly sounding board. These are not youth who are just looking for “more fun”; they are longing for genuine encounters with the living God in the context of trusting relationships with peers and adults and they want to be involved in the process to make that happen.

Food: In every focus group with youth, we heard about the food that typically accompanies the ministries of the church. It's clear that the youth appreciate a good meal and look forward to youth and church events where food is involved. There seems to be a connection between the food that is provided and the sense of community that is nourished. Youth said,

- When Charlie cooks it, it is so good!
- The food is “delicious,” and “exquisite!”
- Tim always provides food!
- We always have food at small group!

Array of Programs: Youth at Mt. Sylvan have six weekly program options (Sunday morning worship, small groups, Sunday night youth group, youth choir, liturgical dance, and praise team) in addition to Confirmation and other special events and trips throughout the year. The vast majority of youth and adults are happy with at least one of these programs and are grateful that the church provides ways for the youth to be engaged.

A Welcoming World: Despite the fact that some “home grown” youth have found it very difficult to connect with other youth in the church, most admitted that those youth who attend a retreat or a mission trip almost always come back feeling connected to the group. The youth ministry seems to have been effective at establishing a core culture in which kids feel loved and accepted by each other, a place where they can talk about things that they couldn't talk about at school, and a place where new youth have been invited and remain active. Many youth expressed that they invite friends regularly.



CHALLENGES

Obstacles to moving the youth ministry strategically forward

Missing Organization and Infrastructure: There was general agreement among parents, staff and volunteers that organization and infrastructure has not been one of the hallmarks of the current youth ministry. There is evidence that the Pastor of Student Life has been making strides recently to work on that but more could be done. One parent said, “It would be nice to get a more advanced calendar of events.”

Other focus group participants said things like,

- It's trial and error going on right now.
- I've noticed that things are a little chaotic and a little disorganized.
- We don't really have a plan and it seems like we are doing things on the fly.
- Some better organization of events would be good.

Fuzzy Vision and Curriculum: The current staff, volunteers, parents and youth are passionate about the youth ministry. They want to see marvelous things happen, and they are willing to work and give sacrificially to make it happen, but most seemed unable to articulate a clear picture of what they envision the youth ministry looking like. One adult said, “If you asked me about the vision of the youth ministry I wouldn't know how to answer that.” We did get the sense that adults want youth to have a Christian faith that helps them make life decisions, but when asked to “dream their dream” for the youth ministry, focus groups seemed to become easily mired in terminal vagueness. Parents and leaders said things like,

- I'd like to see the youth grow.
- I want our youth program to be as strong as it can possibly be.
- The program has to be engaging to engage people.
- I'd like to see a very active youth program. The ones that are there would use what they learn at this church to be able to go out into life making good decisions.

These are all great dreams but without any clear, unified, and measurable goals in place, these dreams will amount to nothing more than dreams.

In addition to the fuzzy vision, there is not an intentional curriculum plan for the 6th-12th graders. Curriculum for youth ministry events is selected randomly and sporadically. One adult said, “We have no curriculum and nobody knows what is going to be taught.” There doesn't seem to be a discipleship path that links all youth ministry events together. An adult leader said, “I don't know if there is an overarching objective of what we want the kids to get out of it.”

Parents Need to Be Asked... and Volunteers Need to Be Equipped: We heard comments from parents indicating that they were willing to help out in the youth ministry but had never been asked. One said, “Why can't the parent group of volunteers grow?” The youth ministry has the opportunity to dramatically broaden its capacity by tapping an extensive pool of parents who would like to be involved. The large youth counselor team of volunteers is involved in the hands-on aspects of the ministry, but there is a lack of volunteers for administrative and behind-the-scenes needs. The good news is that there is untapped potential, especially among parents, who are ready to be asked.

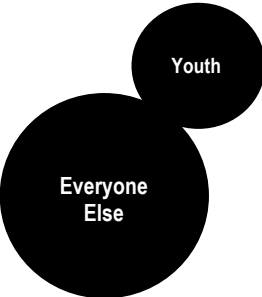


While the youth volunteers that serve in hands-on capacities are clear about their role of building relationships with youth, there is not a formalized, consistent training program for them. Some youth volunteers feel equipped for their roles, but clear job descriptions and written expectations for youth ministry volunteers do not exist.

Missing Rites of Passage: Youth love a good celebration, and it appears the church is missing some golden opportunities for celebrating moments of transition in the lives of the youth. It seems that the logical times to have a rite of passage for the youth would be 1) when they step into the youth program (6th grade); 2) when they complete Confirmation (8th grade); and 3) when they graduate from high school (12th grade). Some parents spoke of their concern that these events do not become rites of passage for their children because of the minimal attention they receive in the congregation at large and in the worship services in particular.

Sunday School: A number of parents and other adults expressed frustration about the current Sunday School situation. The fact that the church offers nothing for 6th-12th graders on Sunday morning during the Sunday School hour has resulted in young people “roaming the halls.” One parent said, “It’s hard when you are welcoming new people to Sunday morning and there is nothing for their youth.”

One Eared Mickey: The youth ministry seems to be separated off from the rest of the church similar to the image of Mickey Mouse with only one ear. The youth ministry is out there in the ear while the rest of the church is within Mickey’s face. In addition to the fact that the youth room is at the farthest end of the building, parents and other adults expressed the need for integration, unity and eliminating “family disconnect” by saying things like:

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- I'd like to see them more active around the church.
 - The one night I went to the youth group the room was packed. I was looking around that room and thinking ‘how wonderful that you have this many but where are they on Sunday morning’? Are they getting anything that carries over?’
 - I don't see them doing much. I don't see them doing projects or fundraisers. It would be good for them to get to know us more.
 - The more visible the youth ministry is and what is being accomplished in that ministry, the more receptive the congregation will be.
 - It disturbs me that it has been 9 years since the youth have been involved in workdays.

There was also a consensus around wanting to see better communication about the programs and activities of the youth ministry. A number of youth and parents expressed feeling out of the loop with regard to the goings-on of the youth ministry. Concerning the event details that are published, one parent said, “There are no real details to the information sent. All we know is the date. There have been several instances where I feel like this is not enough information for me.” One parent said, “I didn't know that it was Youth Sunday this weekend and my son has a part.” And finally another parent said, “There needs to be more transparency.”

In order for youth and parents to be aware of youth programs and activities, the youth ministry needs to major in timely, accurate, detailed, and consistent communication.

Though the Pastor of Student Life utilizes Facebook, text messaging, the church newsletter and bulletin to keep the youth and parents informed of upcoming activities, there seems to be a lack



of consistency and a lack of a broader plan for marketing for the youth ministry, particularly to families and the church at large. We submit that this is not primarily a problem with apathetic adults in the church but a youth ministry marketing problem.

Youth Leadership Missed Opportunity: Some youth we met with talked with some enthusiasm about their desire to have more responsibility on the leadership team. Currently the youth leadership team is “mainly an information meeting” but the youth feel like they are not being used intentionally. One youth said, “At youth leadership team, they mainly just give us the plan.” Another youth said, “It might be good to brainstorm new ideas together.”

Y'all Come!: In spite of the fact that the church and the youth ministry is considered a welcoming place, some youth reported that the youth group can be “kind of cliquy” and be something other than a welcoming environment. One adult said, “They are a group to themselves.” A youth said, “Sometimes the cliquy-ness can make me feel like I don't want to be there.”

In an effort to be more welcoming, the church has provided transportation to youth from the local community so that they can attend youth programs. There is a desire for the congregation to reflect more the surrounding community. As the youth ministry reaches out to the local community, it seems that at the same time there is now a challenge of breaking down racial, cultural, and social barriers. Recently there have been two incidents in the middle school boys small group where two youth had an altercation. Some of the youth in this small group and their parents are concerned about the aggressive behavior they have seen. We heard things like:

- We're trying to reach out to the community around us.
- There are racial tensions at this church.
- How we define ourselves is going to have to be different.
- I think there is some culture stuff going on.
- I need to know that my child is safe when I'm placing them in a different environment.

Under the Rug: In the past year, two youth from Mt. Sylvan have been hospitalized for an extended period of time for drug and alcohol related incidents. The youth and parents we met with talked about the incidents in general terms and didn't seem to feel comfortable speaking openly about them. Some youth leaders and other adults are deeply concerned that this is not just a problem for a couple of youth but that a majority of youth in the church are experimenting with drugs and alcohol. We heard things like:

- Drug abuse, alcohol abuse is rampant in this church.
- It's serious with the high school kids.
- I have found out this week that some of them are doing drugs and that 6th graders are having sex.
- This week I have been just terrified of what I was hearing. I'm very upset.
- It's even beyond what I can understand. It's hard to get a handle on it.

Ah, the Good Ole Days: The youth ministry at Mt. Sylvan has a long history and includes periods of time where the youth ministry “used to have a group of 70-80 kids on Sunday night.” It is clear that traditions are very important to this group (the first Lake J trip occurred in 1972) and years past are remembered with some nostalgia. One adult said, “I'd like to see the youth group here get back to where it used to be.” Even the youth picked up on the theme. One



commented, “The Mt Sylvan youth group has seen its high tide in extreme fashion...We’ve seen triple digits.” In order for the youth ministry at Mt Sylvan to thrive in the future, it will be necessary to appropriately value traditions while refusing to idolize the past.

Money: The youth ministry has been surviving on a “shoestring budget” recently and there is a concern among some that the youth ministry budget is considered expendable. One person said, “As budgets get crunched, the first thing people seem to think to get rid of is the youth pastor. That would crush me if we ever had to do that.” The Pastor of Family Life recently went from full time to part time in an effort to allow for more funds for the youth ministry. None of the church staff has received a cost of living pay raise over the past three years.

In addition, there is some concern that trips may be too costly for families to afford. One adult said, “We have a fair amount of kids in this church that can’t just write a check for an activity.” The youth are also keenly aware of the realities of financial constraints. Many youth expressed the desire for money to never be an issue that prevents youth from participating in the activities of the youth ministry. One youth recognized deeper issues related to money, “Instead of just giving money, it would be good to be involved enough in people’s lives to know what’s going on.”



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Reframe the next 16 months (through September 2012) as a time of direction setting and infrastructure building for the youth ministry. Target September 2012 as a deadline date for a ministry that has sufficient infrastructure and support to provide long-term stability.
2. Present this report to the Staff Parish Relations Committee and the Administrative Council requesting that they endorse a 16-month strategic re-design process for the youth ministry.
3. Establish a 16-month Youth Ministry Design Team made up of the Pastor of Student Life and 3-5 people. Charge the Youth Ministry Design Team with two overarching responsibilities:
 - a. Work with the youth, parents, and volunteers to remove the immediate pressure points in the youth ministry.
 - b. Establish a consensus for the direction of the youth ministry and develop its infrastructure.

DESIGN TEAM TASK #1: Address the Pressure Points facing the youth ministry *within the first three months after this report*

Pressure point 1: Volunteer Administrator Extraordinaire

- Recruit a volunteer to assist the Pastor of Student Life with administrative needs related to the youth ministry.
- In approximately five hours per week this person would:
 - Enter attendance records
 - Assist with registration and planning details for youth trips and retreats
 - Communicate with youth, parents, counselors, and the broader congregation to ensure all are well aware of youth ministry happenings.
 - Make the best use of the two hours/week which are available from the Office Administrator for youth ministry related work.

Pressure Point 2: Address Behavior Issues

- Ensure there is adequate strong, male authoritative presence at the middle school guys' small group meeting each week.
- Follow up with each middle school youth participant and his parents to assess progress toward creating a safe and welcoming environment at the middle school guys' small group.
- Begin looking at long-term ways of addressing cultural differences among the youth.

Pressure Point 3: Youth Sunday School

- Provide structure during the Sunday School hour for all middle and high school youth. Consider the option of making the Sunday School hour a time when youth come together for a short devotion and then are given the opportunity to intentionally serve in other ministries of the church.
- Recruit a coordinator for the youth Sunday School hour.

Pressure Point 4: Volunteer Training



- Equip current youth volunteers with tools for addressing sensitive issues relating to the youth ministry.
- Provide training for current youth volunteers, specifically as it relates to dealing with issues of substance abuse, cultural and racial diversity, and aggressive behavior.

Pressure Point 5: Major Event Coordinators

- Recruit major event coordinators for special events through May 2012 and create a major event notebook for each event.

Pressure Point 6: Know Your Flock

- Make a concerted effort to reach all youth on the church rolls just to touch base.
- Collect and update contact information for each youth and classify each in the following categories:
 - **Active Youth** are the ones whose families are members of Mt. Sylvan UMC and have attended at least once in the past year – plus visitors who have become a regular part of the group. They should show up in your printed youth directory.
 - **Member Inactive Youth (MIA)** are still a part of the flock. You may not need to send them a Facebook message every time the group gets together, but you'll want to regularly pursue these kids, whether they ever show up or not.
 - **Visitor Active Youth** are those who regularly attend youth group and/or activities but are not an official member of the church.
 - **Visitor Inactive Youth** are the ones who may have visited, but you are confident they will never become a regular part of the group. This group requires no follow up. But you'll want to keep their information for the occasional big event to which you'll want to invite everyone you know.
 - **First Timers** refer to visitors who have attended a youth program for the first time. You'll want to have a process for capturing their information on their first visit and follow up with them within one week of their visit.
- Create a youth and leader directory with most updated information for each youth and their family and distribute it by September 2011.
- Create a simple tracking system for attendance in Sunday school, youth group, small groups and special events.

Pressure Point 7: Universalizing Small Group Norms

- In light of past success and present challenges, small groups agree to take a break for the summer.
- Small group leaders and the Pastor of Student Life determine an intentional plan for small groups for the 2011-2012 school year.

DESIGN TEAM TASK #2: Establish a consensus for the direction of the youth ministry and the creation of its infrastructure, including the completion of the following tasks:

INFRASTRUCTURE TASKS THAT BUILD SUSTAINABILITY AND STABILITY



- Visioning: Discuss how the youth ministry can interweave into the church's mission statement and values. Review the current youth ministry mission statement. Develop values and a set of three-year revolving goals, as well as a clear structure for the youth ministry.
- Control Document Development: Complete a youth directory, a 16-month calendar, volunteer application processes, major event notebooks, and a preventative maintenance calendar.
- 7-Year Intentional Curriculum Plan: Create an integrated template for curriculum, including a design for Sunday night youth group, the Sunday School hour, Confirmation, and small groups.
- Compliance Documents: Ensure that copyright licensing for music and videos has been obtained, that an application and screening process for volunteers is in place and that a sexual abuse/child protection policy is adopted and affirmed by all adults working with youth.
- Attendance: Maintain a weekly attendance database.
- Marketing: Establish clear internal marketing processes that allow parents, youth, leaders and the broader church to be exposed to the successes and good news surrounding the youth ministry, and develop processes for communicating about upcoming events and weekly programs that allows participation targets to be regularly reached in the youth ministry.
- Communication: Establish normative processes for effective and timely communication with parents, youth, and leaders. Ensure that the Volunteer Administrator Extraordinaire receives information in order to coordinate effective communication. Work at communication in collaboration with the Pastor of Student Life's work on the church and youth ministry web pages.
- Measurable Markers of Effectiveness: Determine reasonable participation goals for all youth ministry events and weekly programs through September 2012 and take responsibility for filling those events.
- Youth Ministry Manual: Develop a Mt Sylvan Youth Ministry Manual, including a youth directory, a 16-month calendar, results-based job descriptions for staff and volunteers, compliance documents, budgets, game plans, a preventative maintenance calendar and notes for every major youth ministry event.

DEVELOPING AND NURTURING STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

- Strategic Staffing: Propose a clear, appropriate long-term staffing plan for the youth ministry that will provide the church with significant capacity to sustain a thriving ministry to its targeted number of youth.
- Staff and Volunteer Development: Complete results-based, written job descriptions for all staff and volunteer positions in the youth ministry. Provide mechanisms for on-going education and coaching for the youth ministry volunteers including instruction on leading small groups, teaching to different learning styles and intentional community building.
- Volunteer Recruitment: Build a fortified volunteer leadership team, some who will do relational ministry with youth while others work behind the scenes. Create a "fishing pond" list of at least 50 possible volunteers to call on.
- Leadership Launch: Schedule and implement an inspiring leadership-training event for all volunteer youth workers at the beginning of each school year.

DEVELOPING CLEAR STRATEGIES AND NEW INITIATIVES



- Wreck-Nite/Creative Fall Kick Off/Parent Orientation: Develop the current excellencies of Wreck-Nite into an intentional, family-based, incredibly fun fall kickoff event to launch the youth ministry in the fall of 2011. Use that event to cast the vision, share information for the 2011-2012 school year and build enthusiasm about the year ahead.
- First-Timer Process: Develop a process for welcoming new youth to the church and visitors (such as friends) so that they feel warmly welcomed at Mt Sylvan. Develop a timely follow up plan to ensure their return to the youth programs.
- Discipleship Plan: Create and publicize a deliberate plan that allows youth and parents to understand where youth are in their spiritual lives and determine what programs and ministries will meet their individual needs where they are. During this process, look carefully at the structure and function of weekly programs.
- Rites of Passage: Develop a written plan for the processes, events, and privileges that will:
 - welcome and connect the new 6th graders and their parents into the youth ministry,
 - celebrate 8th graders upon their completion of Confirmation,
 - launch the church's high school graduates from the youth ministry, confident that they are surrounded by a supporting church family and committed to live out their faith as adults.
- Parent Engagement: Develop a plan to engage parents in the youth ministry and with each other during youth ministry activities that will:
 - Create a database of parents who are willing to volunteer, including the roles they are willing to play, and aspects of the ministry in which they are most interested.
 - Include regularly communication with parents about the topics being discussed in weekly youth events, enabling them to further discuss topics with their youth at home.
 - Resource and equip parents with information on how to parent teens including how to address issues like substance abuse.
- Develop the Youth Leadership Team (YLT): Develop a plan for capitalizing on the gifts and ideas of the YLT members. Give the YLT appropriate influence on calendar development and vision casting. Charge the YLT with the primary focus of establishing a welcoming culture within the youth ministry. (*Thriving Youth Groups* by Jeanie Mayo might be a resource to consult along these lines.)
- Integration and Visibility: Develop clear strategies and initiatives for increasing the visibility of the youth to the whole congregation and integrating the youth ministry into broader congregational life. New initiatives toward visibility and integration could include:
 - Youth contributing articles to the Grapevine
 - Pastors incorporating stories of/from youth into sermons
 - Youth participating in church work days
 - Youth reporting during Sunday morning worship services about mission trips, retreats, small groups, and youth group meetings.
- Finances and Fundraising: Develop a plan for adequately funding full youth participation in the life of the youth ministry. This plan should include:
 - A 12 month calendar of events which includes anticipated costs for each event
 - Clear expectations for what youth will contribute out of pocket toward anticipated costs, what the church will contribute, and what portion will be covered through fundraising efforts.



- A schedule with an appropriate number of fundraisers based on anticipated needs.
 - A scholarship program, which prevents cost from being a prohibitive factor for youth participation.
- Missions: Continue to build off the desire of youth and parents to make a difference in the world as well as in their local community. Develop a clear, focused calendar for exposure, education, equipping and provision of opportunities to experience mission projects, evaluating the current mission options, and creating a plan for promoting and exposing the congregation to youth missions throughout the year.



PROPOSED TIMELINE

The following provides Mt Sylvan United Methodist Church with a timeline that can serve as a blueprint for the strategic launch of a sustainable, long-term youth ministry.

Many churches choose to use the services of Youth Ministry Architects to provide coaching and experienced troubleshooting through this infrastructure-building process. YMA can be available to serve in the role of “architect” to provide more specialized consulting during the 16-month transition.

May/June 2011

Focus: Preparing for the Process

Outcomes:

- The Staff Parish Relations Committee and the Administrative Council has endorsed a 16-month infrastructure-building plan for the youth ministry.
- The Youth Ministry Design Team has been recruited and oriented to their unique roles and responsibilities over the next 16 months. They have also been established as a sounding board for concerns of parents and church members in which a safe, open, non-judgmental and listening environment has been created.
- A decision has been made as to whether YMA will provide ongoing coaching and support for the Youth Ministry Design Team and youth staff members.
- An article has been written celebrating the great things that are happening in the youth ministry at Mt Sylvan as well as informing the congregation about the renovation process. It has been published in the Grapevine and on the church’s website.
- Result-based, written job descriptions for all volunteer and staff positions in the youth ministry have been developed.
- Youth are registered for Lake J Summer Retreat and all details regarding the trip have been communicated to youth, counselors, and parents.
- Wreck-Nite Fall Kickoff has been calendared for September, a coordinator has been recruited and a publicity plan has been developed.
- Small groups have begun their summer siesta.
- Ongoing phone coaching has been provided for the staff and volunteers.

YMA Option: 1 day off-site

July 2011

Focus: Pressure Points, Leadership Recruitment, and Attendance

Outcomes:

- Work on the youth and leader directory has begun.
- A simple and effective method for tracking attendance at all youth events has been created and is in use.
- The Volunteer Administrator Extraordinaire has been recruited, familiarized with the youth ministry, and has begun working with the Pastor of Student Life and the Office Administrator.
- A coordinator for the youth Sunday School hour has been recruited and the restructured youth SERVE hour format has been determined by the coordinator, Pastor of Student Life, and Youth Design Team.



- The Youth Leadership Team has gathered and given their input on the 2011-12 youth ministry programming for monthly outings/large events.
- The Youth Leadership Team has been charged with establishing a welcoming culture within the youth ministry.
- A list of all volunteer needs for the 2011-2012 school year (both for weekly programs and special events) has been developed.
- A “fishing pond” list of at least 50 potential volunteers, including people from a variety of age groups, has been developed.
- Using the volunteer needs lists and fishing pond list, volunteer recruitment for 2011-2012 has begun.
- Normative processes have been established for celebrating the successes of the ministry in multiple ways throughout the church and a strategy for sharing youth ministry stories regularly with the congregation has been created.
- A Visioning Retreat has been scheduled for the fall and a list of potential participants has been drafted.
- Ongoing phone coaching has been provided for the staff and volunteers.

YMA Option: ½ day off-site

August 2011 Focus: Pressure Points and Calendar

Outcomes:

- Based on attendance tracking, reasonable participation goals for youth ministry events and weekly programs have been set, and there are promotion strategies for meeting these goals.
- Youth have reported during morning worship services on the trip to Lake J.
- Volunteers who provide a strong, male, authoritative presence at the middle school small group have been recruited and trained to engage the small group in ways that allay aggressive tendencies.
- All volunteers have experienced a 2-4 hour Leadership Launch event that clarifies their roles, reviews learning styles and trends, inspires them to grow in their own faith and equips them to serve the young people of the church. The Child Protection Policy has been reviewed and adopted by all volunteers.
 - All small group leaders have received training relevant to small group leadership. Small group curriculum for the 2011-12 school year has been chosen, and kickoffs for fall small groups have been appropriately publicized.
 - Youth volunteers have been trained to deal with issues of substance abuse, cultural and racial diversity, and aggressive behavior.
- A 2011-12 calendar including large group events and cost estimates has been created and approved by the Youth Design Team. The process for developing the calendar includes:
 - The creation of a fundraising calendar for 2011-2012.
 - The decisions as to what portion of anticipated costs students will be expected to pay out of pocket.
 - Publicity for the scholarship program, which allows students to inconspicuously request any necessary financial assistance.
- Major Event Coordinators for each 2011-12 event have been recruited.
- Curriculum resources for the 2011-2012 school year have been selected and distributed to volunteers.



- A first timer process for welcoming new youth has been developed.
- Ongoing phone coaching has been provided for the staff and volunteers.

YMA Option: 1 day off-site

September 2011 Focus: Visioning, Visibility and Fall Kick Off

Outcomes:

- The youth and leader directory has been completed and distributed to all youth families, and leaders.
- The 2011-2012 youth ministry calendar has been distributed to all youth families and leaders.
- A clear strategy for increasing the visibility of the youth to the whole congregation and integrating the youth ministry into broader congregational life has been developed.
- The Wreck-Nite Kick-off, designed to welcome 6th graders into the youth ministry, welcome youth into a program they can get excited about, and introduce parents to a format and structure they feel confident about, has been successfully attended. Sign up forms, surveys and contact information, and 2011-12 calendar of events have been distributed and returned during the event.
- Small groups have resumed with excitement, food, and adequate strong, authoritative, male presence for the middle school guys small group.
- The restructured Sunday morning SERVE hour has begun.
- A youth ministry Visioning Retreat involving staff, volunteers, parents and invested youth has produced four key visioning documents:
 - A Youth Ministry mission statement
 - Values for youth ministry program.
 - Three-year goals and one year benchmarks.
 - Organizational chart with clear structure for church and youth ministry program.
- Volunteer recruitment for the 2011-2012 youth ministry is complete. Coordinators for fall and spring major events have been oriented to their role and equipped with a major event notebook.
- The pressure points in the assessment report have been addressed.
- Ongoing phone coaching has been provided for the staff and volunteers.

YMA Option: ½ day off-site, 3 days on-site

October 2011 Focus: Communication and Parent Engagement

Outcomes:

- Normative processes have been established for effective and timely communication with families and youth. The Pastor of Student Life, Office Administrator and Volunteer Administrator Extraordinaire have worked together to ensure that as many forms of communication as possible—including updating the church's website, the church newsletter, bulletin, Facebook, mass texting, bulletin boards, phone tree, etc.—have been utilized in a detailed and timely manner.
- A game plan for engaging the majority of parents is in place. The plan includes



- a normative process for communicating with parents the schedule of youth ministry teaching topics so parents may continue the conversation with their children in the home.
- plans for creating a database of parents who are willing to volunteer, the roles they are willing to play, and aspects of the ministry in which they are most interested.
- a plan for resourcing and equipping parents for recognizing and responding to issues related to substance abuse.
- Ongoing phone coaching has been provided for the staff and volunteers.

YMA Option: 1 day off-site

November 2011 Focus: Staff and Volunteer Development

Outcomes:

- A Curriculum Retreat has been scheduled and publicized for after Christmas.
- The youth ministry volunteer database now has 50 names.
- The youth and leader database has been updated with the most current information available.
- A clear appropriate long term staffing plan for the youth ministry has been developed.
- A template for major event notebooks has been created and notebooks have begun to be filled with information.
- A structure for the ongoing training for youth volunteers is in place.
- A game plan for reaching out to those youth who are MIA (missing in action) is in place and efforts are made to connect with those youth.
- Ongoing phone coaching has been provided for the staff and volunteers.

YMA Option: 1 day off-site; 2 days on-site

December 2011 Focus: Merry Christmas!

Outcomes:

- Enjoy the kids
- Enjoy the adults
- Enjoy the staff
- Enjoy the season
- Enjoy the Christ-child
- Avoid the fruitcake

YMA Option: none

January 2012 Focus: Compliance Docs

Outcomes:

- Compliance documents are in place such as ensuring the copyright license for music and video has been obtained, application and screening process is in place for volunteers and a child protection policy has been adopted and affirmed by all adults working with youth.



- A Preventative Maintenance Calendar has been created for the youth ministry that will help it regularly deal with on-going “behind the scene” ministry maintenance.
- The costs of all major youth ministry events and trips have been determined through August 2012.
- The restructured Sunday morning SERVE hour is evaluated by the coordinator, Pastor of Student Life and Youth Design Team.
- Ongoing phone coaching has been provided for the staff and volunteers.

YMA Option: 1 day off-site

February 2012 Focus: 7-Year Intentional Curriculum and Discipleship Plan

Outcomes:

- A Curriculum Retreat has taken place and an integrated template for curriculum, including a design for the Spiritual formation hour, youth group, and Confirmation has been created.
- A deliberate discipleship plan that allows youth and parents to understand where the youth are in their spiritual lives and determine what programs and ministries will meet their individual needs where they are.
- The Youth Ministry Design Team has completed a half-year course evaluation of the renovation process and makes corrective action to address those components of the strategic plan that may have gotten off course. Unexpected challenges (which are to be expected!) in these ministries have been addressed with playfulness and proactive creativity.
- A mid-year training event has taken place for volunteers.
- Volunteer job descriptions have been reviewed and edited as necessary.
- A youth ministry budget proposal for 2012 has been adopted by the Youth Ministry Design Team and presented to the Administrative Council.
- Ongoing phone coaching has been provided for the staff and volunteers.

YMA Option: ½ day off-site, 3 days on-site

March 2012 Focus: Missions and Outreach

Outcomes:

- Efforts have been made to build off the desire of students and parents to make a difference in the world as well as their local community. A focused calendar for youth involvement in mission projects has been created. The evaluation of the current outreach opportunities has taken place, and a plan for promoting and exposing the congregation to youth missions is in place.
- At least 50% of the youth ministry’s one-year benchmarks have been accomplished.
- Summer plans are underway.
- The 2012-2013 major events and weekly program calendar has been created and approved by the Youth Design Team.
- Ongoing phone coaching has been provided for the staff and volunteers.

YMA Option: 1 day off-site

April 2012 Focus: Evaluating New Strategies



Outcomes:

- Recruitment of youth ministry weekly volunteers and major event coordinators for 2012-2013 has begun.
- The game plan for engaging parents has been reviewed for effectiveness in meeting parents' needs. Parents have been consulted for their perspectives as part of the review process. The majority of the parents has served the youth ministry in some capacity this past year.
- The effectiveness of the strong, authoritative, male presence at the middle school guys small group in allaying aggressive behavior has been evaluated.
- The Youth Leadership Team has met with the Pastor of Student Life and a group of youth volunteers to assess progress in cultivating a welcoming youth ministry culture.
- The Sunday morning youth SERVE hour has been evaluated for its effectiveness in incorporating youth into the broader church and offering youth an engaging experience during the Sunday School hour.
- Ongoing phone coaching has been provided for the staff and volunteers.

YMA Option: 1 day off-site

May 2012

Focus: Leadership Appreciation

Outcomes:

- A thank-you event has taken place to share how much the church appreciates the time, talent, commitment and energy of the volunteers. The celebration gives leaders the chance to give input on the upcoming year and gives the Pastor of Student Life the chance to inspire the leaders about the vision for the youth programs.
- The Wreck-Nite Fall-Kick off planning team has been recruited and charged with planning & implementing an exciting kick-off event for the youth programs.
- A group of invested youth have gathered and given their input on the youth group planning calendar through August 2013.
- Recruitment of all volunteers for the 2012-2013 youth program is complete.
- Ongoing phone coaching has been provided for the staff and volunteers.

YMA Option: 1 day off-site; 2 days on-site

June/July 2012

Focus: Youth Ministry Manual

Outcomes:

- A manual for the youth ministry has been completed, including
 - Visioning Documents
 - Youth and Leader Directory
 - Annual Calendar
 - Job Descriptions
 - Game Plans
 - Curriculum Template and Record of Resources used for the current year
 - Budget
 - Recruiting Template, with a record of all the volunteer needs for the year
 - Compliance Documents (volunteer applications, music and video copyright licensing, etc.).



- Based on attendance tracking, reasonable participation goals for youth ministry events and weekly programs have been set for the 2012-2013 school year, and there are promotion strategies for meeting these goals.
- Wreck-Nite Kick Off plans are complete.
- Ongoing phone coaching has been provided for the staff and volunteers.

YMA Option: 1 day off-site

August 2012 Focus: Developing Rites of Passage, Intentional Curriculum

Outcomes:

- A game plan has been developed for the purpose of welcoming and connecting new 6th graders and their parents, celebrating 8th graders upon their completion of Confirmation, and sending out the graduates with confidence and support of their church family.
- Curriculum resources for the coming school year have been selected and distributed to teachers.
- Using the discipleship pathway, new programming has been discussed and planned to ensure that all youth are being challenged to grow in their faith.
- A long term structure for the Youth Ministry Design team has been determined.
- Ongoing phone coaching has been provided for the staff and volunteers.

YMA Option: 1 day off-site

September 2012 Focus: Final Defrag and Celebration

Outcomes:

- A Leadership Launch has taken place for all youth volunteers.
- The structure for a more established, sustainable and permanent team overseeing the youth ministry is in place.
- All of the one-year benchmarks have been accomplished.
- The work of the past 16 months of the Youth Design Team members has been celebrated.
- A final “defrag” has taken place to re-up the three-year revolving goals and one-year benchmarks, update control documents, update the Youth Ministry Manual, evaluate the progress of completing the tasks presented in the YMA assessment report, and deal with any current pressure points that are affecting the youth ministry.

YMA Option: 1 day off-site; 2 days on-site

THIS TIMELINE CAN BE SHORTENED OR LENGTHENED, BASED ON THE NUMBER OF HOURS THE CHURCH CAN AFFORD TO DEDICATE TO THE YOUTH MINISTRY.

