



Youth Ministry in the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne

Report by

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Executive Summary

The Christian Research Association was commissioned to examine the factors that contribute to the vitality of youth ministry in the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne. It undertook this research through case studies in eight churches, selected with the assistance of senior people in each region of the Diocese to represent a range of geographical locations in which there was some vitality in youth ministry. Researchers visited the eight churches between November 2014 and August 2015, interviewing youth leaders, youth, vicars and parents, and attending weeknight youth activities and Sunday services.

Most of the churches had youth activities on a weeknight at which there were games, outings and some activities for personal reflection on faith such as through Growth Groups, some combining the different sorts of activities on the same night and some having them on different nights. About half of the churches visited had paid youth ministers, who were assisted by young adults who volunteered their assistance. Others had volunteer co-ordinators, sometimes a single person and sometimes a team. On the night the researchers attended, the numbers of youth varied mostly between 5 and 25.

The researchers talked to the youth leaders, church leaders and parents about their aims in the development of the faith of young people. The major focus was on the young people developing 'a relationship with God' which was seen as involving a daily walk with God, communicating with God through prayer and looking for guidance in daily decisions. The leaders also talked about applying that faith in their values and attitudes towards others.

The researchers talked to the youth about their faith and how they applied that faith in life, how faith had developed, how faith helped them in the difficult times in life and the extent to which the youth ministry helped them work through the issues and challenges of faith. Most of the youth came from families attending the church, although there were also some friends of members of these families. Most identified themselves as Christians seeking to deepen a personal relationship with God. Many spoke of having grown up in the church and going along to activities with their parents, but having come to a point where they personally accepted that faith and where worship had become personally meaningful. They communicated with God through prayer and trusted God in their daily lives. However, in describing what faith meant to them they talked little about the responsibilities of faith or of service.

The researchers looked at those factors which were contributing to the vitality of youth ministry. Having a critical mass of young people with people of different ages and of both genders was important for sustaining the youth activities, and many of the churches were borderline in maintaining a critical mass. Having leaders who were passionate about youth, committed in faith, and with some organisational skills and ability to communicate well with the youth was also critical. Few parents were involved but most were supportive. The churches were supportive financially and in prayer for the youth leaders and the youth ministry, although there was little sense of a joint ownership of youth ministry in most churches.

The youth ministry the research explored was generally effective in the development of a personal faith among young people growing up in church families. However, there was little youth ministry among young people beyond the youth of church families and a few of their immediate friends. Hence, in general the youth ministry was not connecting with the wider population of young people in the area of the church and rarely were there connections with young people who were not of Anglo-Australian background. The reasons for this lie in the lack of connection points between the

wider community and the youth ministry and the lack of a variety of activities or programs which might engage more young people with diverse backgrounds.

Hence, we recommend that youth ministry at local church, region and diocesan level be reviewed to develop a stronger sense of ownership and to explore the possibilities of youth ministry that might engage youth not associated with the church. Churches might take particular steps to develop cross-generational relationships between younger and older people, perhaps through projects and activities which younger and older people might do together. We also recommend that a culture of training in youth ministry be encouraged. We also encourage individual churches to give greater attention to support and guidance for parents in the development of their children's faith.

1. Introduction

Aim of the Proposed Study

The aim of this research is to identify the factors in local churches and in the conduct of youth ministry which contribute most to assisting young people in developing a commitment to Christian faith and in exploring the meaning of faith for their lives.

Context of the research

Since 2000, the Christian Research Association (CRA) has conducted a number of studies among young people, including a national study of youth spirituality (The Spirit of Gen Y – 2002-2008), and a study of young people's engagement with the Bible (2010-2011). In talking with young people in these studies, it is evident that youth activities within the context of a local church are important as a context for both discussing matters of faith and expressing faith, and play a valuable role in the Christian development of young people.

This study builds on previous research undertaken by the Christian Research Association and on research undertaken overseas, such as the study of effective youth ministry in the United States as reported in Martinson, Roland, Wes Black and John Roberto (2010) *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry: Leading Congregations toward Exemplary Youth Ministry*, EYM Publishing, St. Paul.

Underlying this research project is an awareness of great changes that have occurred in the Australian culture that have affected the lives of young people. When young people left school in the 1960s, many of them were expecting to get a job, to get married and to have children within the next five to eight years of their lives. When young people leave school now, a great many have a period of tertiary education, they may try out a range of occupations over a period of time, and they may also enter into a range of relationships before perhaps settling into marriage. The liminal period, the period through which young people move from being children dependent on their parents before becoming independent adults with their own families, dwellings and occupations is extending longer than at any other time in human history. Indeed, the whole nature of the process is, for many young people, a reflexive process of trial and error, that occurs over many years (Giddens 1991) As a consequence, religious identity is formed much later in life and more reflexively than in previous generations. Recent research using the National Church Life Survey data has found that youth groups have become critical for decisions of faith, whereas, for older generations, Sunday School used to be critical (Hughes 2014c). Thus, youth groups are not just times for deepening the religious socialisation, but provide a context where many young people make initial decisions about religious identity and commitment.

1. Identifying Vital Christian Faith

If the aim of the research is to look at how youth ministry can best contribute to assisting young people in developing Christian faith and in exploring the meaning of faith for their lives, then we must develop some notions of what is evidence for a 'well developed' or vital Christian faith.

The National Study of Youth and Religion in the United States used the phrase 'a highly devoted Christian faith' and identified young people displaying this in terms of young people engaged in the personal and public practices of faith such as prayer, Bible reading, and attending church. In that

study, highly devoted Christians were those who said that religious faith was highly important in their lives and who were articulate and not confused about the content of that faith (Smith and Denton 2005, p.110 and p.28).

However, Kenda Dean, in her book, *Almost Christian*, suggests a more nuanced and reflective set of five characteristics of the highly devoted Christian teenager.

1. They describe God as being personally concerned for them and powerfully involved with them. Dean suggests that they see God more as a parent rather than a divine butler or cosmic therapist (Dean 2010, loc.1253).
2. They are highly involved in a religious community and congregations are important sources of support for them (loc. 1289). Not only does it provide social connections but also a sense of 'spiritual belonging' (Dean 2010, loc. 1308).
3. They live in a 'morally significant universe' in which they see their choices having meanings and consequences beyond themselves. They believe that they have a responsibility to care about the wellbeing of others (loc. 1339) rather than thinking of their actions and their futures only in terms of what *they* want (Dean 2010, loc. 1355).
4. They have a strong sense of hope in the future, grounded in the confidence that God controls the outcomes (Dean 2010, loc. 1371).
5. They display the life-giving fruits of the Spirit (e.g. love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control) (Gal. 5.22-23; Dean 2010, loc. 1438).

The Exemplary Youth Ministry project in the United States identified seven dimensions of a vital Christian faith.

1. **Seeking spiritual growth** - pursuing spiritual growth through conversation, study, reading the Bible, prayer, small groups, retreats.
2. **Possessing a vital faith** - awareness of God's presence and activity in their own lives, the life of others and the life of the world.
3. **Practising faith in community** - practising faith privately and publicly through congregational worship, ministries and leadership.
4. **Making the Christian faith a way of life** - integrating their beliefs into the conversation, decisions, and actions of daily life.
5. **Living a life of service** - involved in activities caring for others and addressing injustice.
6. **Exercising moral responsibility** - living with integrity, utilising Christian faith in making moral decisions.
7. **Possessing a positive spirit** - reflecting loving and hopeful attitudes towards others and life (Martinson, Black et al. 2010, p.28).

There are some similarities in both Dean's and the Exemplary Youth Ministry lists. Both lists, in their own way, include measures of:

1. **Beliefs** about God acting in people's lives and in the world;
2. **Private practices** of faith - or seeking spiritual growth;
3. **Public practice** of faith in a faith community;

4. **Application of faith** in life through living lives of service towards others and living with moral integrity and responsibility;
5. **Attitudes** that are positive towards others: demonstrating hope and love.

Our own research has suggested that these developments may occur differently in different cultural contexts. Previous research in Australia distinguished between 'uncritical faith' which is similar to Fowler's synthetic-conventional faith and 'reflective faith' which is similar to the individuative-reflective and conjunctive stages. We have noted that the 'uncritical faith' is found among three groups of people:

1. People born in a 'traditional' culture and accept uncritical attitudes because that is expected in an inherited culture.
2. People who are not educated to critique approaches to life.
3. People with a dogmatic or uncritical personality (Kaldor, et al., 2010, p.30).

Understanding that different cultures approach the issues of authority and the critique of religious faith differently has been important in understanding the nature of faith within multicultural societies.

2. Identifying Vitality in Youth Ministry

Church members often look at the numbers of young people attracted by youth programs or activities and see signs of vitality in the numbers involved. The fact that a program is not attracting many young people, or is failing to have much of an impact on young people, is certainly a reason to ask if it is effective. Nevertheless, we believe that numbers are not the major key to identifying vitality in youth ministry. High numbers may simply reflect a high level of entertainment, rather than the development of Christian faith.

The major sign of vital youth ministry is that young people are showing 'a vital faith' as a result, at least partly, of the youth ministry. Over and above the quality of young people's faith, there may well be a range of measures that we would take as indicative of 'vital youth ministry'. One of the on-going research issues, however, is how to distinguish the measures of vitality from the 'causes' of vitality. Are reports of positive experiences of worship, for example, a sign of the vitality or a cause of the vitality of youth ministry? Is the fact that young people are given space to ask questions about faith a sign of its strength or a cause of mature faith in young people? One of the ways to distinguish whether we are looking at a 'sign' or a 'cause' is to ask whether this factor is essential to 'vital youth ministry' (whatever the outcomes) or whether the factor is important to vital youth ministry because it contributes to good outcomes.

The Exemplary Youth Ministry study mostly spoke of characteristics of youth ministry which were 'causes'. That is, they were features that contributed to good outcomes in terms of the vitality of Christian faith among young people. However, another study from England identified several 'essential features' of youth ministry arising from theological perspectives rather than the outcomes. Youth ministry, the author argued, should be:

1. **Relational** - building trusting relationships;
2. **Incarnational** - taking the world of young people seriously.
3. **Prioritising worship** - as the first and primary vocation of all Christians.
4. **Relying** on the transforming power of God - and is an encounter with God, not about God.
5. **Holistic** in that it integrates evangelism, healing ministry, and service to the community.
6. **Long-term** because faith is a life-long process.

7. **Recognising the importance of discipleship** - as a long-term commitment to God in contrast to the short-term foci of consumerism (Sudworth 2007, pp.10-17).

There are three other possible signs for consideration that arise in my mind, not because of potential outcomes, but because of the theology of Christian community. We suggest that youth ministry should:

1. **Build supportive relationships** which cross the boundaries of age, gender, ethnicity and other social barriers.
2. **Be inclusive** of various types of young people - accepting young people from different backgrounds and with various attitudes towards the Christian faith, sexuality, and other backgrounds. (This may be contentious. Should youth ministry focus on those youth interested in faith or on the spiritual development of all young people?)
3. **Encourage young people to encounter both the transcendence and immanence of God** so that God is understood both as 'mysterious' and beyond our understanding, but also within the activities of daily life.

3. Factors Contributing to Vital Youth Ministry

The Exemplary Youth Ministry Study identified a range of characteristics of youth ministry which contributed to young people developing a vital Christian faith. These provide us with some hypotheses which we should consider for testing in Australia. In other words, we may ask how important are these characteristics of youth ministry in the Australian context and, perhaps, with some different definitions of what a vital Christian faith looks like.

At the heart of their findings were four characteristics.

- **Vital ministries** were thoroughly intergenerational and churches were both warm and challenging towards young people.
- Developed age-level youth ministries were marked by **trusted relationships and custom-designed ministry practices** and activities within a caring atmosphere of high expectation. They focussed on Jesus Christ, so that young people were inspired by his life and ministry, but considered a full range of issues in the lives of young people, using many approaches and creatively employing a variety of activities. They were sensitive towards those going through hard times, but open to questioning from young people.
- These congregations **educated parents** in the faith and equipped them for at-home caring conversations, prayer, ritual, Bible reading and service. Parents were also involved in the youth ministry.
- **The leadership** shown by the pastor, youth minister and adult leaders was competent and 'faith-filled'. From the senior minister down, there was a commitment to youth ministry and to supporting and mentoring those involved (Martinson et al., 2010, p.54).

In other words, the Exemplary Youth Ministry Study argued that there are four inter-related elements in the local church that are important in developing a vital Christian faith among young people. There is the overall nature of the churches' ministry, the specific youth ministry practices and activities, the way that the church supports the parents in having a positive influence on their young people, and the quality of the leadership.

Dean speaks in more general terms in her book, *Almost Christian*. She identified three critical factors.

1. Translation of faith. She also thinks that strong intergenerational relationships are a key factor in developing faith in a world which often interprets life in very different ways from the Christian perspective. She talks about the importance of 'apprenticeships' of young people with mature

Christians through which young people learn the 'talk' and the perspectives of Christians. She notes that parental relationships will usually have the greatest impact although they should be supplemented by other relationships with adults in the church.

2. Testimony of faith. Dean also thinks it is important for young people to also have opportunities to express their faith, and thus become more articulate in it. This can happen in camps and retreats. It can also happen in church services and in other settings. She is aware that sometimes young people are encouraged to learn to say certain things, rather than be honest about what they truly think, but she says little about how one encourages honesty.

3. Detachment. Dean suggests that, in stimulating Christian growth, experiences which confront and decentre can be helpful. She says 'In the church, decentering practices eject us from our existential comfort zones and bring us to a new place ... from which we can reconsider God's action in the world' (loc. 2776). She sees it as important to give young people opportunities to contemplate and reflect on their lives. Sometimes experiences that are outside their comfort zones help them to do this effectively.

Drawing on *Contemplative Youth Ministry*, she comments: 'We have to allow God to "de-program" us from habitually relating to kids as projects that need managing rather than persons who need God's love and trust.' (loc. 2940).

In terms of our own reflections arising from the 'Engagements with the Bible' research, we noted that it was important to have some structured input for young people. Those who had actually done a course, such as *Vetamorphus*, were often much more articulate about their faith. On the other hand, we have also noted in relation to schools that young people often find that camps and retreats often have a major impact on young people, partly because they give time for deep personal reflection, albeit in a structured and guided context.

Another particular dimension in the research was what happened to young people when their time in youth group came to an end. Did they then leave the church altogether? What could be done to ensure continuity in discipleship and faith beyond the youth group?

Research Method

A case-study approach can take into account denominational, local church and local community context. It can take into account the extent to which youth groups engage with young people who are members of church-attending families and those who are not, and the different ways in which youth ministry is being conducted. It can pick up the underlying theological approach to faith development. It can look at these various dynamics within different contexts.

This research focuses on ministry among young people between the ages of 13 and 18, but also involves interviews with older young people up to the age of 24 who were asked to reflect on their experiences of youth ministry and what were the factors which were significant for them in their growth in faith and what happened to them after they concluded their time in the youth group.

We were aware that youth ministry can take a variety of forms, for example, some aspects revolving around tasks rather than regular meetings, engaging partly through social media, or forming around music or drama, for example. Again, a case-study approach can take into account these variations in ways which would not be possible through a general survey.

The Process of the Research

The Perry Institute suggested that in order to get some breadth into our research we visit three youth groups in each of the three regions in the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne: the north and west, the east, and the south. We also looked for a variety of youth groups in terms of size, ethnic background, and theological orientation. People in each of the three regions (Rev. Daniel Nyeth, Chris Durie and Bishop Paul White) helped us to identify suitable churches with youth ministry that could be approached. It should be noted that most of the churches visited had an evangelical and/or charismatic theology. While the strength of this evangelicalism varied, we identified no churches with a distinctively high churchmanship which had a youth group. On the other hand, some churches visited were more liberal and ecumenical in their theology than others.

Several churches that were initially contacted were not able to participate in the research mostly due to youth ministers leaving the church and the youth ministry being in a state of flux. We do not claim that these case-studies are truly representative of youth ministry in Anglican churches in Melbourne, but do represent a range of such forms of ministry.

The case-studies occurred between November 2014 and August 2015. In each case, between one and three researchers visited the church, interviewing the youth minister and in many cases the senior pastor as well as a range of the youth. In most cases, youth were interviewed in small groups. The researchers observed youth activities one evening and one of the researchers attended the service where youth were most involved. With permission, interviews were recorded and notes taken. These were later analysed by the team.

Table 1. The Details of the Case-studies

Location of the Case-study	Region	Nature of Leadership
All Saints, Greensborough	Eastern	Part-time paid youth minister + paid interns + volunteers
St Alfred's, North Blackburn	Eastern	Full-time paid youth minister + volunteers
St Matthew's, Panton Hill.	Eastern	Volunteers
St Paul's, North Caulfield	Southern	Curate + volunteers
Christ Church, Ormond	Southern	Paid youth and children's minister + volunteers
Jika, Jika, Preston	North-West	Volunteers (Sudanese)
St Mary's Sunbury	North-West	Volunteers (led by 2 parents)
Christ Church, Newport	North-West	Volunteers (led by theological student)

2. What is Happening in Youth Ministry

Forms of Youth Ministry

Youth Night and Life Groups/Bible Studies

In every case, the major focus of youth ministry was a weekly or bi-weekly evening gathering, most commonly on a Friday. In one place, this occurred on a Thursday and in another on a Sunday evening.

In all locations, there were periods of games and other fun activities and periods of devotion and study. In most places, these different types of activities occupied different sections of the same night. Young people would commonly meet for some games and fun activities, and then break into some small groups for Bible study and reflections on discipleship, sometimes described as 'Growth Groups'. In one place, there was a short devotional time at the end of the evening for the whole group. Whatever the particular format, in most places, young people were engaged in both types of activities each week.

In two locations, these activities were separated in both time and place. In one church, small age-related and gender distinct groups met for study and discipling during the week in people's homes. In that church, Friday evenings were relaxed times sometimes with a short message focussed on engaging young people outside the church. This church saw the small groups as being the major focus of their youth ministry and, here, the Friday evening was an additional part of it.

In another location, every two weeks the Friday evening was mostly fun activities. Alternative Friday evenings, a variety of age and gender distinct groups met for hanging out together, study and discipling.

One of the major issues in youth ministry was how to balance the fun times of games, 'get to know you' activities and outings, with the more serious times of Bible study and/or personal reflection in which there would be encouragement in discipleship. In all groups, the necessity of having both fun times and more serious times was recognised as being essential in order to achieve the discipling of young people. It was noted that if one only attracted young people by the 'fun' of the activities, it would be hard to move them on from that. The times for developing discipleship were seen as essential to what the church was about. In many places it was noted that the church was not just about providing fun times for young people. It was not there to compete directly with secular youth groups.

Nevertheless, it was widely recognised that while many youth from church families would generally respond well to the discipleship times, their friends who were not from church families would feel uncomfortable with them. Indeed, it was noted that some youth from church families showed little interest in the discipleship times.

Part of the underlying rationale in some places was that the young people would feel comfortable in inviting their friends to the games sessions, and, as they became more involved, they would participate more in the devotional and discipleship groups. There was some evidence of this in some places. We met a number of young people who were friends with young people from church families who were attending youth ministry activities. However, some young people indicated that they preferred that the youth group was for committed Christians. They felt safe and supported in

that environment and they were not very keen to weaken the atmosphere by inviting too many people who did not share their values and their perspectives on life.

In one church, the young people were taught to look for 'people of peace': people who might share the values even if they did not belong to a church. It was suggested that these people were potential future members and they should make an effort to engage them and invite them to youth activities.

In general, however, the youth ministry that we saw revolved around the youth who were members of church families, with just a few other friends of these people. There was one church youth group out of the eight we visited in which the majority of those attending did not have a Christian background. Many of these young people came from dysfunctional homes and found in this Christian youth group a place of safety. This youth group followed a similar pattern to the others in terms of having both fun and discipleship activities and a number of the youth were attending the church. However, this youth group was one of the smallest in numbers of those we visited. Thus, it remains true that none of the churches visited had had great success at involving large numbers of young people who did not have a Christian background.

Mentoring

In some of the churches, youth leaders were assigned a specific number of young people to keep an eye on them and provide some mentoring. These people were often the leaders of small groups and had a special responsibility for those in their small group which extended beyond the group activities themselves. In many instances, these leaders would text those young people in their group during the week, and, occasionally, would meet them outside of the youth group activities. Thus, they would seek to disciple and mentor these young people on a personal basis. However, such mentoring was not highly organised, nor given a great deal of emphasis. In a number of churches, there were no such expectations or arrangements.

Sunday Services

In most locations, there was a worship service late afternoon or early evening on the Sunday which some of the youth attended. This service was not a 'youth service' as such, but was youth oriented. In places visited, the dominant group at the service were young adults in their 20s and the youth leaders themselves were both present and played a significant role in leadership. In most places, the music was youth oriented using songs from Hillsong and other charismatic sources displayed with the use of a data projector. In all these places there was a small band of between three and eight people including guitars and drums. If there was an employed youth minister, it was common for that person to be the preacher. Other young adults were involved in leading the service and members of the youth group often had some roles.

In three of the case studies, there was only one major Sunday service which was for people of all ages and not oriented particularly to young people. In these cases, young people attended the service along with older people and had some opportunities to be involved, particularly through the music. In two places, a youth worship service was held occasionally as part of the week-night youth activity.

In all these Sunday afternoon and evening services, some of the teenagers involved in the youth ministry activities were in attendance along with the youth leaders, plus some parents and a sprinkling of older people. Attendances at these services varied from about 40 to 140. The extent of formality also varied, although none were very formal. There were usually some opportunities for people in the congregation to contribute publicly to the service. In one case, this took place through planned interviews of three members of the congregation about how their faith affected their

involvement in their occupations. In another place, a microphone was handed around to volunteers in the congregation who wanted to make a comment about experiences of God's activity in their lives.

In most of these Sunday afternoon and evening services, the preaching was exegetical, expounding particular passages of Scripture. Sermons were often quite long, up to about 40 minutes, and highly cognitive in their approach, although with some focus on the implications of Biblical teaching for every day life. In no case that we attended did the senior minister play a role in these services.

Where teenagers were involved in the services, it was often in the band or in operating the data projector. Occasionally, a teenager would be invited to do a reading or, for example, would speak about a youth camp they had attended. In no case did they have input in shaping these services.

After most of the services, there were opportunities for the youth to have some food at the church or go and eat together at a local fast-food place.

In one location (Sunbury), the evening service was held in conjunction with the local Uniting Church and held in the Uniting Church building. It was followed by food and then the combined Anglican and Uniting youth group activities.

In one other location (Newport), the roof had collapsed at the Anglican Church. The youth group was held at and combined with the local Churches of Christ. The Anglican service was held at a local Baptist Church property on a Sunday afternoon. This service, then, was for all age groups with some members of the youth group attending.

In most places, the sermons were quite long and conceptually sophisticated and lacked evident application to the lives of young people. There were, however, some exceptions to this. For example, in one place, a local school chaplain preached a very colourful and well-illustrated sermon.

Youth camps

At all the locations visited, an important part of the youth ministry was camps, often held annually, most commonly over Easter. The two major camps in which the Anglican churches visited were involved were the Victorian Christian Youth Convention (VCYC), mentioned in three locations, and Soul Survivor, mentioned in two locations. Several of the youth leaders we met were involved in the steering committee for the Victorian Christian Youth Convention.

Four other locations spoke of having their own camps either just for their own young people or for young people from a group of churches with whom they had some connection.

All the youth who mentioned that they had attended a camp spoke highly of it. They had enjoyed the opportunity to focus on their faith, free of the distractions of everyday life. Several spoke about the extended times of worship. However, more important was being with their Christian friends for an extended period of time and the opportunity to meet new people who shared similar values and attitudes to faith to themselves.

The camps were important not only for the youth but also the youth leadership. In more than half the locations, youth leaders spoke of the fact that they were able to compare notes with other youth leaders they met either through the organising or through the conducting of the camps. Indeed, if they had questions about what to do in their youth ministry, they often turned to fellow leaders

whom they had met through the VCYC or through Soul Survivor.

The leaders noted in several places that these camps were commonly occasions in which young people who were on the fringes of the churches would make commitments of faith. In this context, they had the opportunity to think about their lives and were faced with the challenge of commitment. Hence, these camps played an important role in the faith development of the young people.

Young People from Church Families and Other Young People

The numbers of young people involved in the specific youth activities that the researchers attended varied from about 6 young people to more than 50. One of the youth groups indicated that they had about 85 teenagers on their books, although not all would be involved on any one night. Most had closer to 20 young people. When they divided into groups, the numbers varied from two to about ten in a group.

Most of the youth who were interviewed in the case studies were of Anglo Australian ethnicity. In one church, there was a noticeable mixture of people from different ethnic backgrounds. Another youth group visited was all young people with a Sudanese background. It was evident from the visits that the multicultural nature of the population of Melbourne was not well represented in the youth groups as is true of those who identify with the Anglican church in Melbourne.

In the eight locations, the researchers spoke to approximately 72 young people. Of these young people, approximately 4 indicated that they were not Christians. Approximately nine of the 72 were not from families associated with the church. Almost all of these nine people were friends of people from church families who attended. While these specific numbers cannot be generalised to other youth groups across the diocese, it is evident that there are relatively few young people involved in the youth ministry who were not from church families.

As previously noted, the focus of youth ministry in every location was the discipleship of young people. With just one exception, this was being conducted primarily among young people from families connected with the local church, along with the friends of these young people. There were specific attempts to engage with other young people in some churches, but several churches noted that there had been little success in this and that they needed to look for new ways in which this might be done. In one other location, as previously mentioned, most of the youth were from outside the church and were from 'high needs' families. This was a relatively small youth group and again the focus was on discipleship.

One youth group had run 'Soul', a youth focussed version of 'Christianity Explored'. Young people had been challenged to invite one other person to attend these sessions. In total, about 30 young people attended one or more of these sessions and of those, approximately five had made a commitment of faith.

There was some reflection about how the churches could touch the wider community of young people. However, in some places, this was seen as a task down the track when the youth activities for the church families was better established. In other places, it was assumed that this could be done best, or perhaps could only be done, as young people from church families built relationships in which they could share their faith with young people outside the churches. Thus, the focus in the youth ministry was encouraging the young people to disciple such young people themselves.

In two places, there was some engagement with the local government school. This had led to a handful of young people becoming engaged in the local church. On the other hand, it was noted that the engagement was not aimed at bringing young people into the church. Rather it was an opportunity to build positive relationships. We did not have the opportunity to observe these activities in schools and can draw no conclusions about their general effectiveness.

One youth leader noted the importance of having 'pathways' for those who have no previous connection with the church. It was suggested that a homework club, for example, might be part of a pathway. A number of the churches did expect that the fun nights or fun times in the youth activities would be part of a pathway that might lead to greater involvement. However, in itself, this pathway appeared to be relatively ineffective.

Youth Leadership

In the eight case studies, researchers spoke to a total of thirty-six leaders. Of these, four were more than 40 years of age. Most of these leaders were single young people in their twenties with a few in their thirties.

In most cases, the leadership of the youth ministry was in the hands of young people who had grown up in the church and who, as young adults, now assisted with the ministry among the young people. Many of these young adults were university students. In most places, there was a deliberate policy to encourage young adults who had concluded their time as participants in youth ministry to become leaders. In some places, this had occurred as a senior leader had worked directly to form a community of young adults to whom the specific challenge of ministry to youth had been given. In one church, for example, where there had not been a youth group, the focus of the youth minister over the first year was in building a group of young adults who could then be challenged with leading the youth ministry.

On the other hand, in three locations, the youth minister or the people responsible for the youth ministry were older, married and had their own children. It was noted in all of these locations that these people were well placed to communicate with the parents and were well-respected by the parents. They were also well regarded by the young people, but seen a little differently from younger youth leaders. The relationship was closer to being that of a parent than an older sibling. This had both advantages and disadvantages. In terms of advantages, such youth leaders could speak to youth with the authority of their age and experience. In terms of disadvantages, they probably were not seen as role models in quite the same way as youth leaders who were closer in age to the youth. Having a few older people in charge of youth ministry, assisted by younger people close to the age of the youth themselves, is probably the ideal mix in leadership.

In four of the churches visited, the person who was responsible for the youth ministry was paid, either on a full-time or part-time basis. In other places, the people in charge were volunteers, often with other paid jobs or involved in study. The paid leadership did mean that these people could give more focussed time to their task of leadership. In most cases, these paid leaders focussed on mentoring and training the volunteer youth leaders who were most engaged with the youth. In some instances, they were also involved in writing study materials for use in the small groups.

Summary

In all the locations visited, there were regular youth activities on one weeknight, often a Friday night. In these activities, there was generally a balance of fun times and times of Bible study and/or personal reflection on the Christian life through small groups. Most held Sunday services oriented

towards young adults with some youth involvement late on Sunday afternoons. In many places, informal mentoring of youth was taking place through the building of relationships between the youth and youth leaders.

In the large majority of the locations visited, the majority of youth attending were members of church families, sometimes with the addition of a few of their friends from school. There was one major exception to this where most of the youth did not have a family background of church involvement.

The researchers are well aware that these locations did not represent the 'typical' situation in the Anglican church or reflect the range. There are many Anglican churches in Melbourne with no, or very few, organised youth activities. There are also others with just a few youth. The research team only visited churches with regular youth activities and an organised youth ministry. In some cases, youth were attending the youth activities of the Anglican churches we visited because their own churches did not have activities for them.

3. Vitality in the Faith of Young People

Dimensions of Faith

The most fundamental aim of youth ministry is to grow the Christian faith of young people. However, as noted in the introduction to the report, this can be conceived in a variety of ways. We asked youth leaders, vicars and parents how they would like to see young people grow in faith and what was important to them in the ways that faith was expressed. It was evident in their responses that there were several major dimensions to the faith they wanted to see in young people.

The most common responses were about the relationship the youth had with God, which we have discussed in the following section on 'devotional faith'. Some others emphasised the ways in which people lived which we have summarised under 'lived faith'. Others noted the importance of how they were active in the church which is summarised under 'faithful service'.

We also asked specific questions about the extent to which young people were asked questions about the faith and therefore developing a reflective as distinct from an uncritical faith and how that was being handled with the youth activities and the church. A further set of questions asked about the extent to which young people and their leaders and parents saw that faith as being 'resilient', partly in terms of being able to withstand the challenges of life and partly in terms of being a 'sticky' faith that would be sustained over time, including the time of coming to the end of their teenage years.

Devotional Faith

Many youth leaders spoke about developing a relationship with God. This was seen in a willingness to make a commitment of faith. It was also seen in young people walking 'in joy and peace'. One youth leader described his aim for the young people as 'falling in love with Jesus'.

When asked about how this might be seen, some spoke of the way the youth talked about God. Youth who had committed their lives to God would readily talk about God and acknowledge what God was doing in their lives. One group of leaders spoke about the importance of listening to God and seeking out God's directions for life. One vicar said that he would see their commitment in their desire for baptism or confirmation. Others spoke about seeing the outworking of the relationship with God in their relationship with others, in the sharing of their faith, or in the ways they were involved in the church.

A Lived Faith

In three locations, youth ministers or vicars spoke of seeing deeper relationships with others as an expression of growth in faith. One person spoke of 'loving one another'. Another spoke in more general terms of how people treat each other. Within that context, mention was made of the fact that attitudes to sexuality arose out of those attitudes to others. In another location a youth minister explained that in their groups, they run through a grid with the young people: their love for God, for one another, and for strangers. In the same location, the vicar spoke of the three dimensions of the Christian faith that he wanted to see: worship, discipleship and some form of service.

In two locations, the emphasis was living according to the Bible and 'having the confidence to do what the Bible teaches'. Not engaging in sexual activity prior to marriage was given as an example of such living. Another spoke of living as Christians at school.

Another three places spoke of the importance of young people having a passion to share their faith with others. The sign of growth in faith would be that they were 'multiplying disciples' said one youth leader.

Faithful Service

In four locations, how people participated in the youth group and the church were cited as examples of signs of growth in faith. Youth leaders spoke of the sign of confidence in participation in the youth group activities and particularly in prayer. Another spoke of the willingness of the youth to serve in the church. In another place, there was more general reference to having 'a servant heart' and serving God, again with reference to serving in the church.

An owned faith

In four places, youth leaders or vicars stated how important it was that young people came to own their faith. In one location, this was emphasised at all levels of leadership and was evidently something that had been discussed at length among the leaders. The vicar, the youth minister and youth leaders spoke about the importance of young people having a 'seeker mentality'. The only way to come to an adult faith is to check it out' the vicar said. 'We want them to explore their faith, explore the dark edges, the mysteries of of faith and the unexpected grace of God' he continued. The youth minister suggested that growth in faith was seen in their willingness to explore faith, to ask questions and to learn. There was an independence in their faith. Two of the youth leaders at that location noted that nothing was 'too out there' for discussion. They saw the youth group as very open and very safe. They would consider most things and take young people's questions seriously.

Whether youth leaders saw the youth group as a place where young people could ask questions was explored in each location. In one location youth leaders spoke of their very open conversations. The youth minister at that location said they tried not to give answers, but provide ways for the young people to explore the questions for themselves. They wanted the youth to be forced to wrestle with the questions themselves and not simply regurgitate answers that were given to them. He gave as an example the fact that older youth had been having in-depth discussions about the issues of faith and science.

In another location, youth leaders talked about the importance of being engaged with the Bible, of questioning it and not just taking it at 'face value'.

In several locations, the youth leaders spoke of the importance of the small groups. These provided the opportunity for exploration and asking questions. This was part of what it meant for youth groups not just to be places of fun but places to seriously explore faith. Another youth minister noted that 'being honest about doubts and questions' was important in their small group activities.

A Resilient Faith

Another dimension of faith raised by the researchers was the importance of a 'resilient faith'. Was youth ministry developing a faith that would provide support to young people who went through difficult times? Did they have a faith that would not be destroyed if prayers were not answered or if life became very challenging?

Certainly, youth leaders and vicars indicated that they hoped that the faith of the young people would be resilient.

The next section will look at the effectiveness of the youth ministry in developing faith in its various dimensions: devotional and applied, owned and resilient.

How Effectively Was Youth Ministry Encouraging the Development of Faith?

Evaluating the impact of youth ministry is difficult, particularly when one is only able to evaluate it at one point in time. Ideally, one would want to look at the long-term consequences of youth ministry. However, even if one had the opportunity of following young people over a period of time, there are challenges in identifying what changes in the young people are a consequence of youth ministry and what are the results of other factors.

There are a great many influences on young people. The greatest of these is family, and through the teenage years, the influence of peers strengthens. At the same time, there is the pervasive influence of the culture in which we live, the mass media and the social media which is experienced on a daily basis, the schools young people attend, the sporting clubs and other activities in which they participate, the music they listen to and the books they read. Distinguishing the impact of youth ministry in the midst of all these other influences is sometimes like identifying the additional volume one voice adds to a crowd.

Further, young people are not jugs to be filled. Rather, they interact with the influences on them, rejecting some, while filtering or embracing others. From what is presented, they take what is meaningful to them, often accommodating it to their existing patterns of life and thought. The processes by which they do this are rooted deeply in personality and in the early influences on life, as well as by their capacity for particular patterns of thinking and acting, as is shown by the development psychologists (Fowler and Dell 2006).

Having noted the difficulties, it was important to try to gather some indications of the effectiveness of youth ministry in developing a vital faith. We sought to do that in two ways in this research. The first was to ask vicars and youth ministers, youth leaders and parents how effective they felt that the youth ministry was. The second was to listen ourselves to the expressions of faith of the young people and what they had to say about their experiences. It is recognised that this form of evaluation is limited in its validity in that it is based on second-hand subjective assessments of people who have a vested interest in the success of youth ministry.

The Perceptions of Vicars and Youth Ministers, Youth Leaders and Parents

In all the churches that were visited, there was significant attention to growing the faith of the young people, and most vicars, youth ministers, youth leaders and parents felt that this was being done with some success. In most places, youth leaders pointed to the small groups, such as the Growth Groups, in which, they said, there was teaching and modelling of the practices of faith. There was a widespread feeling that the small group activities were well-supplemented by the worship services at the church in providing teaching. In several places, camps were mentioned as having a significant impact on the lives of the young people.

One vicar said that he did not get involved in the youth ministry itself, but he did see it as important to develop relationships with the youth. He was positive about the impact the youth ministry was having. Having identified the importance of developing an 'owned faith', he said, 'I think we are allowing them to explore faith'. Another vicar spoke of the quality of the lives of the young people as evidence of the impact of youth ministry. He noted as an example how some of the young people had gone on a mission trip to Africa to work for two or three weeks in an orphanage with older people in the church. He was very positive about the ways the youth had participated in that activity and that demonstration of their willingness to serve.

When asked whether they thought that the youth ministry was effective in encouraging faith, all the youth ministers and leaders responded positively. 'I think we are' said one youth minister. He spoke of the difference they were beginning to make in the lives of the young people. He saw that in the change in attitudes and the openness to being part of youth group activities. 'We are on the cusp of heading into a different place,' he said. For another vicar, the evidence was that some of the young people who had come through the youth ministry were now involved in youth leadership.

In another location, youth leaders spoke of the fact that young people wanted to understand what God wants. The youth talked about their relationship with God. Another spoke of how the youth were seeking God in prayer. Another vicar pointed to the fact that the young people were demonstrating a strength of belief in their schools.

In another place, the youth leaders said they had tried to change the behaviour of some of the young people who had been smoking. They had not been successful and had decided that smoking was not the priority. The priority was the relationship with God. Changes in behaviour would follow, they said. Some of the young people were certainly showing signs of growth, they felt, particularly in their willingness to pray.

A couple of youth leaders in different locations said that if one looked at the numbers of youth involved, one might be disappointed with the effectiveness of the youth ministry. However, those who had stayed with the youth ministry were growing as people and growing in faith. That gave them the sense that what they were doing was worthwhile.

One of the vicars noted how difficult youth ministry was in this age and context. 'Christianity is struggling', he said. 'It is a minority culture. Christian ethics are seen as very different from the ways of the world'. It was not easy to disciple young people in contemporary Australian society.

When asked whether the youth ministry was developing a resilient faith, the most common response was that they hoped it was. It is true that one does not really know if faith is resilient until it is tested, either over time or by specific bad experiences. 'We need to be ready to help the young people work through the tumultuous times in their teenage years', said one youth minister. Other youth leaders mentioned mentoring as really important in that process. One youth minister mentioned the importance that faith had to be informed by Scripture and not based just on feelings. Another youth minister emphasised that having good foundations in the Christian faith was the key to having a resilient faith.

Evidence from the Young People

(a) Devotional Faith

Through several questions we asked young people to talk about their faith, about the influences on their faith development, and the impact of the youth ministry. We talked with them about how they felt about the Christian faith and how faith affected how they lived. Another question asked how their thinking about faith had changed from the time they were in primary school and what had been the influences on those changes. We asked them about the impact of special experiences, how they thought about God, and what helped them feel close to God. We also asked them about how faith helped them in the difficult times in life. As an example of whether they were thinking through the implications of their faith for their lives we asked them about their thinking about future careers and whether their faith was having an influence on their thinking in that regard.

In most places we visited, it was evident that the youth were at different points in their thinking about faith and the ways they expressed it. As we asked the questions about faith, there were some

youth who said very little, while others were very articulate. While a few explicitly said they were seeking to find what the Christian faith was all about, others felt they were growing in faith. At the heart of the understanding of Christian faith in all the locations visited was a sense of having a relationship with a loving God. One girl put it this way:

I used to think of God as an authority figure who used to scare me a bit. Now I know to rely on Him more, and realise how much love He had for me. I didn't understand grace when I was younger, I just understood the rules.

She spoke about how her parents had made her go to church when she did not want to go as a young teenager. However, as she had grown older she had seen the example of how her parents treated other people and she had begun to want to grow in faith herself. A girl in another youth group said she used to think of God as a father, but now thought about God as a friend, and not so much as an authoritarian figure.

Another young person described God as 'Someone who is there for you'. While expressed in various forms, there was a widespread sense among the young people that God was there to help and that it was appropriate to turn to God for that assistance.

One indication of the importance of this sense of God being there for you was that, in every location, the youth spoke of the importance of prayer. They prayed together in the Growth Groups or in the youth group. Many of them said that they prayed by themselves. Indeed, quite a lot of their discussion of faith revolved around prayer. One young person defined faith as praying and 'Stuff happens'. Another young person said that youth group had helped him to a better understanding of faith. For example, he said, he no longer asked why God doesn't give us this or that.

'Sometimes we read the Bible, but not often' said one group of young people. In response to a specific question about Bible reading, another young person admitted reading was not his favourite activity. On the other hand, another noted that he had now started learning Bible verses. He did not care about that when he was younger. In talking about faith and its expression, some young people referred to listening to Christian music. This was almost as common as references to reading the Bible.

In general, there was evidence in all the youth groups visited that a devotional faith was central and was being developed in the youth.

(b) A Lived Faith

In talking about their faith a few young people spoke about how they were trying to be loving, caring and helpful to others. One said faith was about trying to be friendly to others, while another said it was about forming deeper relationships with other people.

More frequently, young people spoke of the Christian faith as 'living up to God's standards' and trying to be more like Jesus. They spoke of how faith changes the things one does and the decisions one makes. As a Christian, one boy said, 'you have to draw a line on what you will do'. He added that this could be hard in a school context. Another young person spoke of how faith not only affects how you make decisions but how you choose what influences you.

There were a few references to sharing faith with others. One young person said:

[The Christian faith] is a huge part of who I am and why I do things. I rely on God rather

than myself or other people. I talk about my faith with heaps of people. All my friends would know I am a Christian. Talking about my faith is quite easy, but they might have to bring it up.

A few young people spoke about going to church. One important part of being a Christian was 'keeping Sundays free for church' said one person. Another person said that he felt empty if he did not go to church.

There were a few young people who had become engaged with particular church projects in contributing to the society or the wider world. One was involved in a breakfast club provided at a school. The same person was involved in a community meal that was provided for people who were struggling with life. A couple of boys had been involved in fund-raising for the Red Cross and World Vision, while another had packed shoe-boxes for Christmas and sponsored a child. Another couple of young people spoke about a 10 day trip with other members of the church to work in an orphanage in Zambia.

We asked many of the young people about their future careers and whether their faith had any influence on their thinking in that regard. Some of them said it had some impact and directed them towards some options rather than others. One person wanted to be involved in overseas missions. Another wanted to go into the navy to fight for the country and help the world while another wanted to be a policeman so that he could help people. One person said that being a Christian would probably mean he would not get involved in the secular music industry where there was a lot of drugs and where the lyrics were often not good. On the other hand, many said that faith had little or no impact on their thinking about their careers.

While there was a general awareness that faith had implications for how they should live, the focus was generally on personal ethics: on being good, helping others and being involved in the church. There were few hints that the young people saw faith as something which might influence the whole direction of life other than avoiding certain sins and being a good person.

(c) A Resilient Faith

The young people we spoke to indicated that their faith certainly helped them in the difficult times in life. 'Yes, it does help' was the typical answer, 'you know God is there for you'. Others spoke of the fact that it helps because God is always there, or because sometimes prayers are answered. Another person spoke of the fact that you can always talk to God and He knows all about you. But does this mean that these young people have a resilient faith? Is it a faith that helps them to cope with the disappointments in life, in the times when the answers from God are not as they had hoped?

The youth leaders said that they saw the youth groups as developing a resilient faith. One leader explained this in terms of their encouraging young people to seek God in prayer. Others noted that the Growth Groups or mentoring help. Another youth group leader noted the importance of having a strong foundation in God, while another said that it was important that faith was based on Scripture rather than on personal feelings.

Despite these assurances from the youth leaders, one wonders how resilient is the faith that is being developed. There were strong expectations among a number of young people we spoke to that God would intervene on their behalf. What if that does not occur as expected?

One young person mentioned the assistance they found through the youth group itself and through

the assistance given by the youth leaders. How the youth leaders provide support to youth is probably a significant factor in the resilience of the young people.

Another factor that was mentioned several times was the importance that faith was 'personally owned'. Certainly, there are intentional efforts in a number of the groups to develop that sense of personal ownership.

(d) An Owned Faith

In the context of focus groups, those who spoke most were generally those who were most positive about faith. However, there were a number of young people who were not sure whether they were Christians or not. One person said that he needed proof. So he had come to the youth group to ask questions. Another said:

I would say I'm a Christian, but I am not sure about it. A few years ago I would have said I was a Christian because that's how my family raised me. But now I'm not sure of finding my place.

When asked whether the youth activities allowed young people to ask questions and whether those questions were taken seriously, there was strong affirmation of this in most of the groups. Three of the locations where we conducted interviews, the openness to young people's questions was one of the characteristics of the youth group on which they prided themselves. One spoke of the importance of not giving answers, but rather providing ways in which young people could explore their questions and come to their own answers. They wanted to encourage young people to wrestle with their own questions and not simply regurgitate what they were taught.

Others spoke of encouraging the young people to explore and ask questions, particularly in the small groups. They noted that confidentiality was respected so that young people might feel free to ask the questions in their minds. The tendency for young people to gossip had to be addressed in order that there was a safe and open atmosphere.

Most young people also indicated that they could talk about what they wanted to, that they were comfortable in asking questions, particularly in the smaller group contexts. In several places, it was noted that they were encouraged to ask questions and that the leaders were respectful.

On the other hand, one wonders how open were the questions and how ready some leaders were with answers. One group of youth leaders responded to the question about whether they allowed questions by talking about the importance of being engaged with the Bible and not taking it simply at face value. One wonders how they would respond to young people who questioned not just the interpretation of the Bible but the authority of the Bible. Others noted how important it was that young people grappled with the questions of faith themselves rather than providing them with easy answers.

(e) How faith had developed

What have been the influences on these changes and on the development of their faith? When the young people were asked about what they thought were major influences that had changed their thinking, their responses varied quite considerably.

A number of the youth spoke about their families and their influence on their growth in faith. However, many said that camps and the youth activities, particularly the Growth Groups, had had an influence on them. Some said that youth group 'refreshed' them each week. They talked about

taking an interest in matters of faith which they had not had when they were younger. They had a greater understanding of the Bible and were better able to apply it to their lives. They appreciated having 'a group of people we can be around and we can go to'.

In terms of special experiences, there were two primary areas which had had an impact on them: The first was in relation to worship and music and mostly occurred in extended group contexts, such as on a camp. Some of the leaders spoke of the fact that it took young people a time to get into the atmosphere of the camp, but by the second day they were generally fully 'into it'. Perhaps there is some sense in which these were mystical experiences. They were certainly experiences which took the young people out of themselves. The group context was often very important to such experiences. They felt a strong sense of belonging.

The second type of experience was specific interactions with God. The catalyst for such an experience was that things have not been going well or there is a special need. In one youth group, all the youth said short prayers. Most of them were about being able to do well in examinations at school. The experience occurs in the experience of despair, helplessness or anger and involves a sense that God is there and everything will work out alright. In other cases, God was seen when there were specific answers to prayer and they saw God saying 'I'm here, doing what needs to be done'. In many ways, these experiences reflect the moral therapeutic deism described by Smith and Denton (2005). God is seen as the divine butler or the ideal parent watching over the child. Some of these experiences involve a sense of comfort in a difficult situation. Other experiences are largely experiences in which expectations or hopes are met, and thus are highly dependent on how the hopes and expectations have been framed.

Conclusions

There was a strong emphasis on the growing of the faith of the young people in all the Anglican churches we visited. It was an intentional part of the ministry they were offering. They were not there for providing 'fun' occasions, even if fun times made up one part of their programs. They were there to 'make disciples' and all the youth groups were intentional about doing that. Certainly, among some young people, there was evidence of positive impact in the ways young people spoke about faith themselves and their understanding of the influence of the youth ministry on them.

There was evidence that young people were taking faith seriously. They were studying the Bible and seeking to apply it to their lives. The focus of faith was that God was with them and they could turn to him in prayer, and God would act in their lives. In small groups, a lot of the focus was on how God had had an impact on their lives.

Many of the young people were involved in worship. In many of the churches, a substantial proportion of them attended youth-oriented services, usually Sunday late afternoons. They participated in the music and in other aspects of the services. Some of the youth groups held worship times within their youth group activities. For many of them, the special times of worship were at the camps they attended once or twice a year.

In some churches, some young people were also involved in some forms of service, mostly within the church. Some were teaching younger children, although this was not as common in the Anglican churches as we had found it to be in The Salvation Army. More were involved in the youth-oriented services of worship. In one church, some youth had been involved in an overseas mission project.

However, the ways in which the young people spoke of their faith suggested that the major focus was on a God who would be there for them, who loved and cared for them, and would help them

out in times of need. There was a sense that they needed to obey God and be good people. As Christians, they were wary of the 'influence of the world' which might draw them into drugs, inappropriate forms of sexuality, and into disrespectful attitudes towards other people. However, there was little sense of a God who demanded not just being nice, but the transformation of society. There was no mention of concepts such as individual sin or the need for social justice. God was seen as evident in their lives, but, interestingly, Jesus was rarely if ever mentioned when they spoke about their faith.

There was, in many places, an emphasis on an 'owned faith' and young people were encouraged to ask questions and to grapple with the answers. They talked about turning to God in the hard times and their gratitude that God was with them. But one wonders how resilient their faith would truly be if God kept doing what they did not accept. Certainly, the report from youth leaders and from some of the youth themselves was that some young people accepted the faith that was offered, while there were others who had rejected it and turned away from it. We also met some who were quite intentionally seeking, asking whether they could accept what was being taught.

The evidence that has been gathered on the effectiveness of the youth ministry in the various churches in this project is slim. It has been reliant on interviews with the youth leaders and some of the youth themselves. The youth were generally interviewed in groups, often in the presence of the leaders and would be unlikely to say anything that was highly controversial in that setting. We were not able to observe the lives of the young people themselves and there was no longitudinal dimension to the study. It is also difficult in a study such as this to separate out the various influences of family, church, school, friends and youth ministry. It is likely that, in fact, the strongest impact occurs as all those influences combine and work in a similar direction. There was evidence in our interviews that those who were most positive about the youth ministry were young people from families where their parents also attended church and encouraged their involvement.

At the same time, in most places, youth ministry was not having a great impact on young people who did not have a Christian background. There were some friends of the young people from Christian families who had come into the youth ministry and had found a new sense of life there. But these examples were relatively rare. Indeed, some of the young people appreciated the fact that the youth group was for Christian young people with similar values and attitudes to themselves. Having an impact on the broader population of young people is largely beyond the scope of most youth ministries.

4. Contributing Factors to Vitality in Youth Ministry

Vitality in youth ministry is distinct from the vitality of individual faith. It has to do with the ways in which ministry occurs and the context and support for that ministry. It is not something that could be directly measured. However, the researchers looked for a number of factors which might have an impact on the vitality of youth ministry, some of which have arisen from general studies of organisations and churches and others which have been shown by studies in other places to be of specific importance. It should be noted that all the case-studies took place in churches in which it had been noted that there was some vitality in the youth ministry, although at different levels, and thus our research took the form of an 'appreciative enquiry' as to the nature of that vitality and the factors which contributed to it, rather than a critical assessment as to whether the youth ministry was vital.

1. A Critical Mass

The largest of the youth groups we visited had about 85 young people on their books and an average attendance on Friday evenings of about 60 young people. Some of the youth groups that we visited were quite small, and in one place, the night we visited, there were about five young people present, far out-numbered by the number of youth leaders. In every group we visited, it was explained that there were a lot of young people away that night. However, that reflects the pattern in church services, that, on any particular night, perhaps just half of those who have some regular contact will be present. There are always issues of competing demands from other activities, and, for young people, not least from study and examinations. This irregularity in attendance is just one of the factors which make it difficult to achieve a 'critical mass' of young people.

The fact is that most young people will only keep coming to an activity if they find friends within it who are of similar age, and, during their teenage years, of the same gender. The age range which counts as 'similar' will be narrower for younger teens than for young adults in their twenties. Because of the rapid development of thinking and socialising through the teenage years, most young people aged 13 will be looking for friends who will be within a year or two of their own age. A group of 18 year olds will not be attractive to people who are 14 or 15.

Thus, the minimum 'critical mass' for a group catering for 13 to 18 year olds, boys and girls, will be about 12 young people, and ideally, at least 18 young people evenly spread in age, both boys and girls.

The problem is that many churches do not have that many young people amongst the families who attend. A number of young people said they came to the youth group the researchers were visiting from other churches which did not have sufficient young people for a youth group. This presented something of a dilemma for some leaders as they were concerned that they might be accused of 'pinching youth' from other churches. Given the relatively small number of younger families in some churches, it is likely to be a continuing, and perhaps a growing, problem.

There are a number of ways in which churches might respond to the problem, some of which are occurring at present:

1. Combine groups across several churches.
2. Develop more area activities. Certainly, the camps performed this function for many of the young people. They affirmed the fact that they provided opportunities to meet a wider range of young people.

3. Collaborate with the youth groups run by other denominations. There was one example in the locations we visited where Anglican and Uniting Church youth had a joint youth group. They also had a joint youth service. It appeared that this was working well. Another church had a combined youth group with a Church of Christ. Most young people go to the church with appropriate youth facilities and show little concern about the denominational distinctives. It would certainly be better for the sake of young people for Anglican churches to be involved with ecumenical youth activities rather than there to be no youth ministry for their young people.
4. Change the nature of the youth ministry so that it attracts a wider range and larger numbers of young people. The issue is how to do this without jeopardising the activities of discipling young people with a Christian background who want to grow in their faith. However, this is associated with a range of challenges and is discussed in more depth on p41.

2. Patterns of Leadership

There can be no youth ministry without leadership, and the quality of youth ministry is obviously dependent to a significant extent on the quality of leadership. Some of the details of the selection, training, payment and support of leadership is discussed in the following chapter.

In a number of places, it was noted that in times past there had been problems in finding leaders who had the capacity for the leadership of youth ministry and the time and energy to give to it. It was also frequently noted that there had been a rapid turnover of leaders: that many people had not stayed in the position long.

Some of the youth ministries observed had been quite strategic in the development of leaders, working particularly with their young adults to develop them into a committed team ready for the challenge of passing on their faith to the next generation of young people. This had worked quite effectively in some places, but had not worked in others. It depended on young people staying around after leaving school and being willing to take on these responsibilities. In many places, particularly outside the major cities, many young people have to leave home after school for tertiary education or for work. Others are simply not suitable or not motivated to assist with youth ministry.

Another option for finding leadership is for the church to employ a person to undertake it. There are a number of advantages to having paid leadership. It means that the employed person is freed from having to undertake other activities to support himself or herself to give time and energy to the youth ministry. Employment means that a person is more accountable and the church can work with the leader in developing the expectations of leadership. It also means that the church can develop expectations in regards to training and professional development. An employed person is often in a position to give time to the development of a volunteer team.

In three of the churches visited, the senior youth minister was employed. In each case, the person employed had shown considerable ability and been able to gather around him a team of volunteers in whom he was investing time for the development of further leadership. In one case, the youth minister was a curate. In several other places, it was noted that it would be good to have a person employed to lead youth ministry. On the other hand, it was suggested that some paid youth ministers lack the passion of the volunteer and may fulfil the role as 'just a paid job'.

There was a mixture of male and female leaders in every location we visited. This is important as girls and boys will share differently with male and female leaders. In one church, the senior leaders

were a married couple. However, in every other location, the senior leader was male. While this is certainly not a problem in itself, it could become a problem if it was associated with a different attitude to the authority of male leaders.

The critical factor in leadership is that the leader (or leaders) are able to relate well with the youth. When asked what were the qualities of a good youth leader, most frequently young people referred to the need for leaders to be able to form good relationships. They had to have empathy and be genuine. They would interact easily and would be good listeners. It would be easy to have a conversation with them and they would make the youth feel comfortable in their presence. They would be open-minded and non-judgemental. They would make themselves available to the youth.

At the same time, a number of youth said that they wanted leaders who were enthusiastic, committed and passionate. They would be happy and excited about the youth activities, and, in this way would set the tone. They would join in the fun, and not just stand on the sidelines and shout instructions. They would not be over-controlling, but would be able to lead the group and bring people together to operate as a team. At the same time, they would encourage an environment in which all felt safe and appreciated.

Most of the youth looked more for an older sibling model than for a parent model. They wanted someone fairly close to their age who would join in activities with them. Some said that they felt someone who was within 10 or 15 years of their own age would be more likely to have similar experiences and to know what they were interested in. On the other hand, in one place where parents had taken leadership, it also worked well. The parents were well respected and appreciated and joined in most activities with the young people. The parents also knew when not to be involved so that they did not intimidate the young people but allowed them to express their faith in their own way.

It was mentioned in several places, that an older youth leader tended to have greater respect among the youth. They would listen to them and would take notice of the guidance they were given. This was noted by some parents as really helpful. Having a youth leader in his or her forties who, to some extent, provided a 'parent model' either to lead with the help of younger assistants, or to be an assistant and mentor for young leaders who acted as 'older siblings' appeared to be the ideal combination.

Another characteristic of a coordinator of youth ministry is that they be organised and self-motivated. They must get things done and must win the respect, not only of the young people themselves, but also of the parents and of the church. This means that they must communicate well with younger and older people.

Youth leaders themselves noted that it was important to have a heart for the youth and having a commitment to faith. Some spoke of the importance of being genuine. As a young person put it, it was preferable for the leader to say they did not know the answer to a question or know what was best, rather than give the response they thought they should give because of the position they were in. Young people have the ability to quickly see through those people who are not entirely honest or open about what they themselves think or believe. Young people who feel that the youth leader is not really interested in them will also pick that up quickly.

Youth leaders also mentioned that it was important to be willing to give things a go. Youth leadership required people to step out of their comfort zones at times. In that regard, it is important that youth leaders do not take themselves too seriously.

While it was noted that a youth leader had to have the ability to run programs and activities, it was suggested that such skills could be learnt. The ability to listen and the passion for youth ministry are more important as prerequisites.

3. Organisation

While relationships are most important, youth ministry does not happen unless times for meetings and activities are organised. Relevant information must be clearly conveyed to the youth and their parents. Some of the youth ministry coordinators who we met were far more organised than others and the quality of the organisation had an obvious impact on the way things were happening and young people were involved.

Effective organisation has become increasingly important as government and community regulations and expectations increase regarding working with young people. People involved in youth leadership have to have 'working with children' checks, for example. Permission has to be sought from parents if one is to take the young people off-site.

While clear and well-communicated organisation is necessary, in dealing with young people, it is also necessary to be flexible. Expectations are not always met and arrangements do not always work out. The good leader is ready for this and can work around whatever has been prepared if it is no longer appropriate. The young people appreciated where there was effective organisation, clear instructions and expectations, along with appropriate flexibility.

4. Style and Variety of Activities

The youth groups that we visited were 'generic' rather than being formed for a particular purpose such as music or drama groups. At the same time, the young people did indicate that they enjoyed having a variety of activities. Various people made comments about how some young people came only if there were the sorts of activities that they enjoyed. Others made comments that sometimes they enjoyed the activities more than at other times, and that girls and boys had different preferences in the nature of the activities with boys generally preferring more competitive and active games than the girls.

In a consumer age, other research has suggested that young people are highly selective in the activities that they attend. They participate in specific activities depending partly on the other people attending and partly on the nature of the activity. In other words, for many young people, there is little commitment to the youth group as such. Rather, there will be commitment to particular relationships and choices made about specific activities in which they participate.

It is important that a youth group seek to cater for a variety of interests and preferences. Thus, it must offer a diversity of activities, recognising that attendance will vary somewhat according to the activity. Certainly, that was the reported pattern.

However, this preference for specific activities may mean that the future lies more in a variety of groups or activities, such as music, drama, social welfare, Bible study or discussion, rather than a generic youth group. It may be one of the reasons why most Anglican churches have struggled to engage many young people apart from those in church families in most of their youth groups. The future may lie in offering a great variety of activities such as music, drama, small discussion groups, games nights, opportunities for social engagement, sporting clubs and so on. Research undertaken by the Christian Research Association among more than 4,000 students who attended Catholic

schools found that more young people were engaged in such specific activities associated with churches than were involved in generic youth groups or attending services of worship (Hughes 2013) .

However, there is no particular case of a church offering such a variety of activities which provides a good test for this hypothesis. Certainly, young people evaluate the potential of involvement, not just in terms of the activity, but in terms of the relationships and the opportunities to meet new people that an activity provides. At the same time, some young people suggested that it was important to have a variety of activities and their attendance would sometimes depend on the program for the night. In a similar study of youth ministry in Salvation corps, it was found that a number of young people said they were more engaged by band practice than youth group.

The problem for the churches is that many of them are not large enough to offer much by way of variety in activities. It is certainly much easier for a mega-church with hundreds of young people involved to do this than a small local congregation. Nevertheless, it may be that more can be done between a group of church or at a regional level in camps and school holiday programs in terms of specific activities. Within any 'generic' youth group, it will be important to have some diversity in the style and variety of activities.

5. Parental Involvement and Support

Most youth leaders reported that parents were supportive in terms of bringing young people to activities, that they would occasionally assist in specific ways (such as running a barbecue or driving young people to a particular event) if asked, but they were not generally involved in the youth ministry. It was also noted that some parents did not give youth group a high priority.

Parental support is obviously important, particularly for younger youth, simply in terms of making sure they have transport to get them to the activities. However, the parents interviewed were more open to discussion with youth leaders about the programs and activities. Parents were concerned about the personal and social development of their children, and those involved in the churches were often concerned about the spiritual development. Few of the churches visited had taken steps to involve the parents in thinking through the youth ministry or taking some joint ownership of it.

There was a tendency for youth leaders to feel that youth activities should be a high priority, and they often felt that the parents did not share that level of priority. Indeed, parents are concerned about the holistic development of their children: ensuring that school work is done, that their children develop their health and wellbeing through sporting activities, as well as ensuring that the children develop socially and spirituality. It is important that youth leaders and parents understand each other, and that youth ministry develops in a way which helps the young people maintain a balance in their lives.

6. Relationships with Church Members and Ownership by the Churches

The American study of youth ministry, as published in *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry: Leading Congregations toward Exemplary Youth Ministry*, argued that the most important factor in effective youth ministry was the affirmation of the youth and the support of the youth ministry by the whole congregation. They argued that this involved affirmation and support by the primary leaders of the congregation, but that it also involved the development of positive relationships between young people and older members of the congregation.

From a sociological perspective, one might portray this as effective socialisation into the church community as the individual is welcomed and supported through warm and supportive relationships with members of the community. Youth ministry cannot be separated from other aspects of the life of the church, with the expectation that the youth will naturally become part of the church in their own time and as they take the initiative. It is important that the church as a whole, and individuals within it, take the initiative in seeking to build positive relationships with the young people and involving them meaningfully in the life of the church.

Our discussions with the church leaders certainly indicated, in every case, there was strong support for the youth work from them. In most cases, there appeared to be a mature and supportive relationship between the vicars and the youth leaders. The vicars provided support and guidance as requested, but did not try to interfere with day-to-day running of the youth ministry. Several youth leaders said that the support they received from the senior minister was greatly valued.

In every case, youth leaders indicated that they had strong support from their churches. In almost every church, youth leaders spoke of the generosity of the older people in terms of helping to fund youth ministry and special camps and other activities and their prayerful support of what they were doing. In several places, youth leaders were members of the parish council and felt the support of the council. In those churches with youth services, a sprinkling of older people attended those services and gave their support to them.

However, in a number of places, young people indicated they did not get to meet the older people much. When they did, they did not have much to talk about. One youth minister suggested that older people should be greeting the young people by name when they met them at church, but that often did not occur. The larger the church, the more this appeared to be an issue.

One of the larger churches had printed out the names of all the VCE students on prayer cards. The older members of the congregation took the cards and prayed for the students. Yet, there was often limited personal involvement across the generations, partly because few older people attended the evening youth service.

Another church had tried specific social activities to bring the generations together including a games night for both youth and older people. They felt that this was a step in the right direction. Another church spoke of the strong links that had been formed through an overseas mission trip in which some of the older youth went with older members of the church. This had certainly led to some strong relationships. Another church had had a progressive dinner in which the young people had visited a number of homes of older members of the congregation.

Where young people were involved in ministry within the church, such as through a kids' club, or with the provision of a community meal, they would get to know the older people. Usually such relationships were experienced by the young people as positive and supportive.

In some of the smaller churches, this was less of an issue in that families knew each other well. Yet, even in some of these churches, there was little sense among some of the young people that the older people were there for them.

However, young people occasionally noted that the older people were critical of them. They would question why they were using an Ipod in church when they were reading the Bible on them or making notes about the sermon!

7. Youth and Services of Worship

In five out of the eight churches visited, there was a service on Sunday afternoon or evening which was oriented to younger people. In three of these places, the major target congregation was young adults in their twenties, but a number of the teenagers also attended, as did a number of older adults. In one place, the focus was more on the teenagers themselves and quite a number attended, along with some adults of a variety of age groups. In another place, the evening service was generally oriented to young people with a specific youth service, run by the youth themselves, once a month.

In the other three churches, there were no specific youth services. Youth were involved in the main service. However, in two of those churches, occasional 'youth services' or extended times of worship similar to a Sunday service were held as part of the Friday evening youth group program.

In most of the churches visited, whether there was a specific youth or young adult worship service or not, some of the youth were involved in providing the music for worship. When talking about involvement in the church, the involvement in providing music was often mentioned and was evidently a form of participation they valued. While some did play a role in other ways, such as at the sound desk or operating the data projector, this was never mentioned by the young people. One person mentioned that she sometimes read the Bible in church.

The fact that the music was contemporary and that they enjoyed the music was a significant factor in encouraging the involvement of the youth. In most of the churches there was an extended time of 'worship' at the start of the service. The extent to which young people participated in it varied. In some places, the young people in the congregation did little more than listen to the people on the platform. While it was evident that the leaders were trying to develop a sense of worship in the congregation, sometimes this felt more like 'worshiptainment' for the musicians and worship leaders, rather than something that engaged the hearts of most members of the congregation.

The other issue for comment was the sermons. In general, there was a feeling that in the youth and young adult services the sermons were generally more relevant to them. They were a little more targetted to the issues that they were thinking about. However, the sentiment that 'some sermons are more relevant than others' was frequently echoed. This was important to the young people. They wanted something they could 'think over'.

From an external perspective, some of the services supposedly oriented to young people that researchers attended were conceptually sophisticated and involved teaching sermons of more than 30 minutes. The style of some of these sermons was very much like an old-style exegetical lecture with the addition of a measure of passion. In none of these sermons were there any visual elements or use of the data projector. One church provided some printed headings for the sermon. In one church, the sermon used a strong narrative style that was easy to visualise.

Just one young person suggested the services were too long and that they were not used to that. Another person said 'I don't know why I come'. Most of the young people were not critical. However, few offered strong positive comments about the sermons in particular.

One comment made in a couple of locations was that youth services were not very different from other services except that young people might be a little more involved. It was suggested that the youth found it difficult to know how to do worship differently and make the worship their own.

While there is considerable debate in the churches about the value of having different worship

services for different groups of people, the general observation from these case-studies is that different services can be more effective in engaging young people in worship. When everyone worships together, worship tends to be developed to suit the majority of the congregation and only token gestures are made towards fringe groups, whether they be ethnic groups or whether they be young people or children. In general, churches which have had different worship services for different groups of people have grown in size, while churches which have encouraged everyone to worship together, such as the Uniting Church and the Salvation Army, have tended to decline in numbers. The unity of the church is best developed by bringing all the groups together for special occasions and at times and in ways in which the diversity can be celebrated, rather than expecting individuals to join in activities where some of it will be relevant to them and some of it will not be. On the other hand, it would seem that a lot more thought needs to go into the youth oriented services so that they really do engage the youth, both in the times of worship, and particularly in the ways in which faith is explored. Among the questions must be "How appropriate are 30 minute lecture-style sermons for the faith development of young people today?"

8. Pathways to Involvement in the Church Community

There was often an assumption, implicit or explicit, that there was an effective pathway for young people outside the church to become involved in the life of the church. The start of the pathway would be participating in the games or social life of the youth activities, having been invited by a friend. After finding their place in that group, they would then become more involved in the Growth Group activities of the youth ministry and begin to explore the Christian faith. From there, it was hoped that they would start coming to the services of worship in the church, and eventually become involved in service, and perhaps in leadership.

There were one or two cases where we met young people who were well along that path. The major problem, however, was that relatively few young people from outside the church became regularly involved with the youth activities.

The pathways were working much more effectively for young people who had grown up in families who were associated with the church and for whom involvement in Sunday services had occurred since childhood. Their involvement in the wider life of the church was often a product of the involvement of their families. Nevertheless, it was encouraged as they made friends with other young people and some older people within the life of the church. It would also be encouraged as they are integrated into the life of the church through contributing to the music, children's activities or other aspects of Sunday worship. In a few places, youth were mixing with the older members of the church in mission or welfare projects.

In several of the churches with strong young adult groups, there were pathways from youth groups into a young adults Bible study or discussion group. In another church, there were a variety of 'home groups' in which young adults could become involved. In most of the churches, there was some expectation that youth would graduate to become youth leaders. One church offered one on one mentoring to young people after Year 12 for one year. Another church had a young adult weekend and invited year 12 students to join them.

9. Regional Activities and Resources

Camps were widely affirmed through the churches as supplementing the local programs, providing special spiritual experiences for the young people in relation to faith, and as providing opportunities for developing friendships with other Christian young people of similar age.

Two churches each had had involvement in:

- Victorian Youth Convention camps;
- Soul Survivor camps; and
- ESA Country Ministries camps.

In one church, a youth leader had attended State Youth Games, although the young people in the youth group had not been involved.

While these camps were seen as being of great value, partly because they brought young people together from different churches and partly because of the 'large-scale' worship sessions and the quality of speakers who could be organised, the churches also recognised the value of their own camps where they could have a more focussed time building relationships among their own young people. Seven of the eight churches had either run their own youth camp recently or were planning to do so in the near future. Just one church mentioned that every two years they had a multi-age church camp which some of the younger people attended along with older members of the congregation. The feedback from the young people who had been on camps was very positive. They enjoyed the opportunity to build relationships with their peers, and the time of focus on their faith, as well as the fun times.

Several youth leaders mentioned that they had found the camps good places for learning what they themselves should be doing in youth ministry. They had learnt from other leaders they had met at the camps. Some of the youth leaders were on committees organising these camps and found others who provided advice and mentoring in youth ministry to those committees. Thus the camp programs facilitated networking among those involved in youth ministry.

There was little awareness among the young people who were interviewed that they were associated with the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne. Most seemed to have no idea what a diocese was. Nor was the fact that their church was Anglican mentioned. Denominational identity did not appear to be significant to the young people. Their identity was with the local church. There was no particular way in which the Anglican Diocese connected with them.

For some of the youth leaders, the Archdiocese was barely on their radar. Youth leaders working in the Eastern region were aware of the work of the Eastern region youth coordinator. A number of youth leaders indicated that they valued the networking that was provided, the assistance and advice that was offered, and the flow of information about activities which came from the co-ordinator. However, there was little assistance of that kind in either the southern or northern regions.

In one instance, youth leaders had contacted the Diocesan office asking for assistance. A minister with a great deal of experience in youth ministry had visited them and had provided them with many ideas. This had been much appreciated. It was also noted that the Diocese was able to help with matters such as insurance and administration. It was mentioned by another youth minister that the Diocese has helped with policies such as child abuse.

There was a general feeling that the Diocese should be more proactive in encouraging youth ministry in local churches. One particular way it could contribute was in recognising youth ministry as a form of ministry in its own right, not necessarily expecting that it would be the work of a curate on the way to being a priest. Several of the youth ministers were studying at Ridley College. Their studies included some specific studies on youth ministry. However, there was an awareness that there was no clear career path in youth ministry in the Anglican Church.

Many of the larger churches saw no point in the Diocese being involved in developing studies or

other resources for young people. It was much better for these to be produced locally so that they were appropriate for the particular needs of the local youth, it was suggested. Others felt there were ample resources on the Internet, through the camping organisations, and through Koorong. However, in a few places, leaders felt that they would appreciate if the Diocese was able to provide or point to suitable resources, and perhaps provide some forms of training. The coordinator in the Eastern region had assisted in setting up some mentoring arrangements which were greatly appreciated. Others suggested that this would be of great help to them.

Conclusions

In most of the churches we visited, it was evident that some vital youth ministry was occurring. The major factor in the vitality of the youth ministry that was observed was the warm pastoral relationships between youth leaders with a strong Christian commitment and the young people. Most of these young people were from Christian families. However, these relationships with these young people who were like 'older siblings' to the teenagers confirmed their faith and provided them with effective models for their own faith development.

In all the churches, there was a balance of fun and of discipleship activities. Thus, the young people sensed that they could have times of fun and be followers of Jesus. There was generally an openness to the questions and explorations of young people which was helping them to own their faith. The youth groups also provided the opportunity to develop strong peer relationships with other young people who shared the Christian faith. It was an environment in which they felt safe being Christians. While all the youth groups had a variety of activities in their programs, the question must be asked whether there was a need to develop a greater range of youth groups around specific activities such as music, drama, social justice and mission, rather than rely on generic youth group activities.

Many of the young people attended church services and quite a number of them were involved, particularly in providing the music for worship. Many churches had regular worship which was oriented more towards young adults and some teenagers were involved in those services. While the teenagers noted that some services were more relevant to them than others, the researchers felt that more thought needed to go into developing services that were engaging and relevant for the young people and which communicated in forms appropriate to them.

In every church visited, the church was positive about youth ministry. They supported it in prayer and in financial giving. However, the building of relationships between older members of the congregation and the youth was patchy. In many churches there were a few older people who came to the young adults' worship service. However, the building of relationships across the generations often depended on family relationships rather than on any specific initiatives by older church members or by the church themselves. The ideal situation, as one youth minister stated, of the older people greeting the young people by name and indicating a real interest in their lives as individuals, rarely occurred. The exception to this was when both youth and older people were involved together in mission or service projects. Such joint activities need to be initiated if the young people are going to identify with the parish as a whole rather than with the youth group.

Parents were generally positive about the youth ministry and supported it by ensuring that their children attended. However, few youth leaders talked with the parents about the activities. There was little sense among youth leaders that they were in a partnership with the parents in the faith development of the young people. It would seem that, in many places, a deeper sense of joint ownership between parents and youth leaders of youth ministry could be developed.

Camps were seen as special highlights in the annual calendar of youth activities in most churches. Among the organisations running these camps were VCYC, Soul Survivor and ESA Country Ministries. The young people enjoyed the opportunity to meet other young people from different youth groups and to spend some focussed time with their own friends and reflecting on their own faith. Most churches also held their own camps from time to time and these were valuable for building relationships between youth leaders and the youth and among the youth.

5. Youth Leadership

As noted in the previous chapter, ensuring appropriate forms of leadership is one of the key factors in youth ministry. If there are no people who can take leadership in youth ministry, or if the people available do not have the appropriate gifts and talents, then youth ministry simply does not get off the ground. There were several instances in our interviews where it was noted that, for a time, there had been no leadership, and hence no youth ministry.

The youth minister is the key person as this person must give guidance and direction to the whole ministry and will have a major role in the selection, training and support of other leaders, and will determine how other leaders best use the particular time and gifts they have available to contribute to the youth ministry. The term 'youth minister' is not always the term used in the churches, but it has been used in this report to refer to the person who is 'in charge' of youth ministry (usually responsible to the church for the youth ministry). In seven of the eight churches visited, there was a single youth minister or senior youth leader. In one case, this role was taken by a married couple.

Selection

All but two of those involved in youth ministry in the eight churches had been members of the church before being appointed youth leaders. This was true of those who were paid leaders as well as those who were volunteers. Many of them had been members of the youth group themselves before becoming leaders, although some had moved from other churches during their youth or as young adults.

It would appear that, in most cases, the churches looked for people in the local church who had the capacity for leadership. Indeed, in some churches, there was an implicit expectation that former members of the youth group would become leaders in some role or other as they became old enough.

In a couple of instances, the church had chosen to appoint paid employees into the role of youth ministry who had not previously been members of the church, but came with some experience and with passion for youth ministry.

There was little mention in the interviews of explicit succession planning. In a couple of churches, senior youth leaders were mentoring junior leaders with some expectation that those people might take on more senior leadership in the long term. In other cases, however, there was a sense that youth ministry would occur if there were people willing and able to take responsibility for it.

Training

While one person in youth ministry had had full ministry training, a couple of others were doing some studies at Ridley College. However, most had not had any systematic training in youth leadership. One person said he had watched some on-line videos on youth ministry. That person also had a mentor external to the church. Several others had received some training by being leaders at camps or in beach missions. In these contexts, they had often done a one-day intensive training program. One church had had a visit from a senior minister with extensive experience in youth ministry. In a couple of churches, the team of leaders met regularly for some training from the senior youth minister.

However, it seems that in most cases, the patterns of youth ministry were developed from prior experience as young people within youth groups. These patterns were refined through talking with

other youth leaders in other situations, and some experience through organisations providing youth camps.

It would seem that there is a strong oral culture of youth ministry which has developed across these churches. It is informed by the youth leaders past experiences and by communication among youth leaders. It was suggested to the researchers that there were many training events available to youth leaders but few mentioned that they had attended such events.

In many cases, people learnt through experience. One group of leaders noted that on some occasions they had not properly prepared what they would do at the youth group. Those occasions did not go well and they realised that it was important to be well organised before the night.

There was a recognition that the most important dimension of youth leadership was forming positive relationships with the young people through which they would have fun together and faith could be shared. At that level, perhaps little training is required.

Yet, given the fact that the teenage years are important periods for the development of mind, body and heart, that many young Australians do experience mental illness, and that there are issues of duty of care in youth ministry, one wonders if the training of most of those in youth ministry is sufficient.

It would also seem that while all the youth leaders interviewed in the course of the research were deeply committed in their faith, the level of reflection about their faith varied greatly. Some had thought deeply about their own faith and the faith they were seeking to develop among the young people, while others less so. When asked about the growth of faith they would like to see in the young people, most youth leaders spoke in terms of a devotional faith of loving God and sharing that faith with others which the young people owned for themselves. While a few spoke in terms of applying faith in their lives, mostly this was seen in terms of coming to church, praying and being good people. In two places, not having sex before marriage was mentioned as an important indicator.

Nevertheless, there was comparatively little reflection on what youth ministry was really about in terms of developing faith in young people and how one might be most effective in doing that. One of the things that training can often do is to develop awareness of other dimensions of youth ministry. A greater variety of mature and systematic inputs might deepen the quality of youth ministry in a number of the churches visited.

Training would assist youth leaders to think outside the box. Most have limited experience of youth work other than in the churches in which they grew up. Some had only experienced one church in which they had grown up and in which they now exercised leadership. Training would help them to be aware of different ways of thinking and developing youth work. It would lead to greater creativity as well as more maturity in their teaching roles. As society changes ever more rapidly, the need for creative thinking in dealing with the changes becomes increasingly important.

Payment

In four out of the eight case-studies, the youth minister was a paid employee of the parish, in one case full-time and in two cases with other ministry responsibilities.

One of the major issues with paying youth ministers was finding the funds within the churches. In some places, people said that the youth group was simply too small to warrant the funding of a paid

youth ministry worker. However, there was also some ambivalence about having paid people in youth ministry. In a number of churches, they said that paid people might not be motivated in the same way as volunteers, and, by implication, suggested that paid employees might not be as passionate about youth ministry. Others simply felt that there was no need for paid employees if there were volunteers available.

On the other hand, it was recognised that people who were paid could devote more time to youth ministry. They were also directly accountable to the parish for their ministry. Certainly, a number of youth leaders indicated that time was a major challenge for them.

In times when most university students have part-time employment, it would not seem unreasonable to provide some remuneration for dedicated youth leadership. There was no actual evidence that such remuneration reduced passion. At the same time, it could help ensure that time was given to the task and that there was accountability. It might also be expected of the paid part-time person that they would do some training and be engaged in some development and networking activities.

The other issue in relation to pay is the need to create some 'career paths' in youth ministry.

Support

When asked about the support that they had, youth leaders most commonly mentioned the vicars. Indeed, support from them was critical for them to be able to perform their ministry. Youth ministers, in particular, appreciated the regular times they had with the senior ministers. While no examples were found in the studies undertaken for the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, other research has indicated that where support from senior leadership was not present or when senior ministers tried to micro-manage the youth ministry, youth leaders have felt they had no choice but to leave the youth ministry.

In several places, the role of the area youth co-ordinator was mentioned as very supportive or as setting up support structures. These were people who were helpful partly because they were outside the local church, but also because they had a wide knowledge of youth ministry and were able to share resources.

Junior leaders often found much of their support from the senior leader and among themselves as they worked together as a team. In a few instances, people noted that they had mentors or prayer-partners who had given them great support.

Supportive families also made a great difference. Some spoke of spouses in that regard, while some junior leaders spoke of the support they received from their parents.

While people find their own support, it is important that there are official channels of support available. Area youth coordinators can perform an important role not only in giving support, but linking people to support systems in the wider church.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

What We Found

In our visits to the eight churches, we met many teenagers who showed evidence of significant maturity in faith. Many had high levels of devotion and were seeking to journey with God. They not only looked to God for help, but were actively seeking God's will for their lives. Many were active in prayer and Bible reading, as well as being involved in their churches. Some were involved in service themselves, particularly in providing music for worship, and some in other ways, such as involvement in children's ministry. Their daily actions were influenced by their faith. They wanted to live out their faith in their daily lives.

We found evidence of most of the seven dimensions of a vital faith identified by the Exemplary Youth Ministry project in the USA (see p.6) in all the churches visited:

- young people seeking spiritual growth;
- possessing a vital faith, awareness of God's presence and activity in their lives;
- practising faith in community through participation in congregational worship;
- making the Christian faith a way of life in that it was seen as influencing all parts of life; and
- possessing a positive spirit.

In some cases we saw evidence of young people living a life of service and exercising moral responsibility. However, many youth groups did not appear to be providing specific ways for young people to demonstrate their care for others or address issues of injustice.

Most of these young people were influenced by families who had nurtured them in faith from their earliest years. However, that faith had grown through vital youth ministry. All the examples of youth ministry that we saw combined times of fun with times of intentional discipling. The young people were learning how to interpret God's interactions with their lives. They were learning to live lives which reflected love for God and love for others.

In every case, the youth ministry that we saw was led by committed, passionate leaders who related well to the young people and who were truly seeking to encourage them on their journey of discipleship. In most places, the youth ministers and senior youth leaders had a team of young adults who assisted them in this process. As far as we could ascertain, these young assistants also approached their roles in youth ministry with energy and a real desire to nurture the youth.

In all cases, the youth ministers and other leaders were members of the local church where they were serving. Many had grown up in the church or had joined in their teens, and they were involved in youth leadership because they were seen by the church as being responsible young adults.

More than half of the churches we attended had weekly services of worship which were oriented towards young adults and teenagers. Many of the teenagers who we met attended these services and indicated to us that they found these services helpful. Some older people attended these services and were active in developing relationships with the young people. These services contributed to the youth identifying not just with the youth group but with the wider church.

In the other churches, the youth attended the services with older people. There were similar opportunities for them to be involved, particularly through the music and operating the sound system and data projector.

Thus, many of the major features of vital youth ministry as discussed by Sudworth are present. In most churches, the youth ministry was built around positive relationships in which faith was being modelled. It prioritised worship and pointed to the transforming power of God, recognising the importance of discipleship. Some of the other characteristics mentioned by Sudworth were present to some extent: being holistic, incarnational in that it took the world of young people seriously and looked for 'life-long' faith.

The idea that youth ministry should be inclusive was present in as far as all young people were welcomed. However, openness to different backgrounds and different ways of thinking about life were not particularly evident. It was also evident that the focus was on a transcendent God active in daily life, while the immanence of God, the Mystery at the heart of all that exists, the God who is beyond human understanding who existed before time and whose presence cannot be contained within the universe, was largely ignored.

In terms of the four factors which the Exemplary Youth Ministry study identified as being critical for vital youth ministry (see pages 8-9), two were present to a large degree.

1. Appropriate age-level ministries, marked by trusted relationships and custom-designed ministry practices focussing on Jesus Christ.
2. Leadership of the youth ministry by competent and 'faith-filled' people, supported and mentored by senior leadership.

However, although there were a few exceptions, most churches were weak in developing intergenerational relationships within the church, although a few were taking specific steps to do that. The fourth factor was also not generally present: parents educated and equipped to contribute to the faith development of their children and involved in and taking some ownership of the youth.

From our case studies, we identified several other factors that impacted the vitality of youth ministry.

1. **Critical mass of young people.** In most places, this was barely achieved in all age groups and in both genders across the teenage years, which meant that, in some places, the continued functioning of youth activities was somewhat tenuous.
2. **Variety of activities to engage a wide range of young people.** In most places, the variety was limited. In most places, that 'variety' occurred in a limited way within a 'generic' youth group and was not appealing to most youth who were not part of church families. Further, there was a limited variety of ways in which discipleship was approached both theologically and in terms of activities.
3. **Clear pathways beyond youth ministry activities.** The extent to which there were clear pathways to further involvement in the church and in the wider Anglican community varied from one church to another. Many churches had Bible studies or discussion groups for young adults, thus providing one further step. There was often an expectation that when the youth were too old to participate in the youth activities they would become leaders. However, the transitions were generally not well managed and there were limited options for those who graduated from the youth groups.

Thus, while many good things were happening in the eight locations visited, and although we visited mostly larger churches, most churches were struggling to maintain a critical mass of both boys and girls at the various age levels through the teenage years who were attracted by a range of

activities and presented with clear pathways into the life of the church. While it was highly likely that the youth groups would lead to a number of youth who would become active adults in the church in the future, it was not always clear that there would be sufficient numbers to maintain the viability of the church in the long-term.

The Challenges

1. Youth Beyond the Church

In most of the locations we visited, the youth ministry was highly focussed on the youth who were members of the families of church members. It is providing a high level of support and a high quality of socialisation for them. However, the number of youth in that category was relatively small in most churches. Youth leaders have encouraged the young people to bring their friends. This had had some limited success and we met a few friends in most places who had become part of the group. However, in most places, the numbers were still marginal in achieving a critical mass. In most places, the church was having very little impact on the wider population of youth in the area.

One church had developed a range of contacts with young people from high needs areas in the local area. Most of these young people had come to the youth group through personal connections with young people involved. However, this youth group was quite small.

Another church had a Friday night activity designed for young people outside the church. However, it was not very successful, and they were re-thinking whether there were incarnational ways of connecting with the wider youth population in the area.

Those churches which emphasised the importance of being open to questions and to exploring faith probably had a little more success in involving the friends of the young people who did not have a Christian background. It was in one such church that one person told the researchers that he did not believe in Christianity at the moment but was involved in order to find out about it.

A number of specific comments can be made in relation to connecting with the wider youth population.

1. There was talk in several places of having some contact with teenagers through local schools. This can only be done in a limited way and it may not be ethical (or legal) to be using relationships built in school through 'casual' involvements to seek to bring young people into the youth groups. Some advertising may be ethically done in schools in terms of letting youth know what activities were available in the area. Further, we saw little evidence that working through the schools to invite students into existing youth groups would work.
2. With two exceptions, the churches were failing to engage youth other than the Anglo-Australians. One exception did have people from a range of cultural backgrounds. Another location had a mono-ethnic youth group of African young people. However, in most places, including some locations which were highly multicultural, there was no representation from youth of non-Anglo ethnicities. It may be that, in order to address this, it may be necessary to develop explicit forms of ministry for youth of these other communities.
3. In all locations, there was a mixture of fun and discipling activities. In several places, young people said they felt that the expectations to pray and to talk about God in their lives would put many young people off from becoming involved. Certainly, the purpose of youth ministry is not simply to provide fun activities for young people. The purpose is to call and equip young people for discipleship. However, there does need to be a balance between the

attractiveness and the expectations of young people involved, and, in some places, this balance may need to be re-thought in order to more effectively engage youth who have not grown up in Christian families that attend church.

It may be that specific pathways need to be developed in order to engage youth who have not grown up in church families. One church had run Youth Alpha and a few young people had made commitments of faith at the end of it. However, there was no on-going activities through which a sense of belonging could be developed.

Certainly, there was an emphasis in many churches that young people should be sharing their faith with their non-Christian friends. But it is unfair to be putting on young people the whole burden of evangelism among their generation. The churches themselves should be looking at possible strategies. Some research has suggested that 'belonging' to a Christian group often takes place prior to believing. Hence, it is important to develop structures where 'belonging' can be developed.

There are some major theological issues here. Is the growing gap between young Christians and young people who do not attend church partly a result of Christians having moved to a more intense and personal faith? Why is it that more liberal Anglican churches, and many broad Anglican churches, have failed to engage young people? Where are the points of intersection between contemporary youth culture and the Christian faith, or does the faith require young people to largely separate themselves from the dominant Australian youth culture?

Is there any way in which youth ministry can focus beyond the privatised faith of the few young people raised in church families? With the help of the whole church and its various agencies, can it address the dark aspects of contemporary youth culture such as the issues of youth suicide, the epidemic of mental health problems, the prevalence of the drug culture, and the widespread sense of meaninglessness among young Australians? That probably means addressing the issues of unemployment, seeking to transform youth culture, building community and helping young people to find the meaningfulness of life in faith. This would be a very big step beyond where most youth ministry currently is positioned. It would certainly require additional resources apart from those that are currently placed into youth ministry. But are such steps possible with the assistance of the whole church?

2. Youth Leadership

The youth leaders that we met were deeply committed and enthusiastic about their ministry. In many places, youth leadership was structured with a senior leader or youth minister who was mentoring the junior leaders. Some oversight was being provided by senior ministers. There were several youth ministers who had had or were engaged in some theological training.

However, it appeared that most of the 'training' for youth leadership had come through involvement in some interdenominational camps, or through talking casually with other youth leaders. There appeared to be an 'oral network' which was providing informal training and some support. Others indicated that they learnt through their involvement and through having been a member of a youth group when they were younger.

While the youth leaders appeared to be doing well in building relationships with the youth who were under their care, there seemed to be little ability to think outside the box, or to take creative initiatives. There were a few occasions where youth leaders appeared to have difficulty in creating some sense of order among younger teenagers. On a few other occasions, the leadership of the Bible study appeared to be a little naive and not well suited to the needs of the young people.

Some youth leaders indicated that they were aware that some training activities were available. However, no youth minister or youth leader was fully trained in youth leadership. Developing a culture in which some training is expected, and providing some basic training modules, might well help youth leaders think more creatively about youth leadership and help them in the process of discipling the youth.

3. Developing Ownership of Youth Ministry in the Church and Among Parents

All churches reported that there was strong support in the church for youth ministry. The senior minister and the members certainly wanted it to happen. They wanted to have young people involved in the life of the church. In many places, they had demonstrated their commitment to it through their willingness to give financially to it. Many prayed for their youth and the youth leaders. Parents were generally supportive of it, bringing their children to the events, and helping out with transport and occasionally in other ways. In many of the youth-oriented services, there was a sprinkling of older people supporting it.

However, youth ministry appeared to be something that many members of the church left largely to the youth leaders. The youth leaders did not ask them to get involved and most members of the church were rarely if ever involved.

As one of the youth ministers said, it would be great if the church got to the point where most older and younger knew each other and greeted each other by name and took an interest in each other's activities and interests. On the few occasions where there was evidence of this occurring, it was through mission or service activities in which younger people and older people had collaborated. A mission trip to help a church in Africa was one significant example. Such joint, intergenerational activities should be encouraged.

It would also be great if both youth leaders and parents saw themselves in partnership as they sought to develop the faith of young people. From time to time, it would be good if they sat down together and thought about how they best complimented each other in encouraging that development. While most of the youth did not want their parents looking on at their Friday night activities, it would be good if there were occasional events at which parents, their children and the youth leaders participated.

In one church, a parents' discussion and Bible study group occurred on a Friday night at the same time as youth group. There was a sense among the youth leaders that the parents were supporting them in prayer.

Having age-specific activities is important in a church. However, ultimately the socialisation into the life of the church comes about through a wider involvement. Ensuring that relationships are built across the generations, and developing a sense of ownership in the youth ministry across the whole church, will contribute to the young people developing a sense of belonging in the church, not just in the youth group.

It is also important to have pathways in place as young people progress from youth activities into young adulthood and then beyond that as they develop their own careers and families. While many churches had paid some attention to involvement immediately beyond youth group, such as through young adult discussion groups or through youth group leadership, the options for these young adults were often limited. There was little sense of pathways beyond that particular transmission.

Recommendations

In the local churches

1. That local Anglican churches seek ways of developing a strong sense of ownership of youth ministry as a vital dimension of ministry. Where numbers are too small to develop it among young people in a particular church, churches may well look at whether it is possible to develop youth ministry in conjunction with nearby Anglican churches or in conjunction with churches of other denominations.

The ownership of youth ministry should be developed through regular communication about youth ministry within the church, through encouragement to contribute to youth ministry through financial giving and prayer, and through developing ways of building cross-generational relationships with young people, perhaps through particular projects which they can do together.

Another way of a church developing ownership is through developing a 'reference group' for youth ministry which meets a couple of times a year or once a term with the youth leaders to look at the way the overall objectives of youth ministry are being met.

2. That Anglican churches employ youth ministers or senior youth leaders, whether on a part-time or full-time basis, wherever possible to enable them to give time to contribute to take leadership, to ensure that the youth ministry is well organised, and to make sure that youth leaders have some training.

3. That Anglican Churches consider selecting as youth ministers, and, as far as possible, youth leaders, people who have had some training for that kind of ministry. In that regard, they would be developing a culture of training for youth ministry, even if this only means an intensive weekend course. The church should encourage those who are engaged in youth ministry to undertake regular training and development and should expect to cover the costs of such training.

4. That churches examine ways in which they can support parents who attend the church in Christian parenting and in a sense of collaboration in youth ministry. As parents, the church and the youth ministry collaborate, the impact on youth will be much greater. Youth leaders should be encouraged to regularly invite input from the parents into their general planning and thinking about youth ministry and to have occasional events which include the parents.

5. That churches develop or build on existing informal and formal patterns of mentoring both youth and youth leaders, both through activities in which intergenerational relationships can be formed, and by encouraging specific structures of mentoring where appropriate.

In the Diocesan Regions

6. That each diocesan region employ a youth co-ordinator who has responsibility for networking among youth leaders, ensuring training opportunities are available, providing support and developing mentoring arrangements. The youth co-ordinator should also be available to help churches initiate youth ministry. Currently one region employs such a person.

In the Diocese

7. That the Diocese develop guidelines for churches on the definition of roles, selection, training, support, and forms of accountability for coordinators of youth ministry.

8. That a culture of training for youth ministry be encouraged and opportunities for training be created, ensuring that units of training are readily accessible, preferably on-line, for youth leaders.

These should include units which will help youth leaders to be attuned to and able to appropriately refer young people with mental health problems, for example. There also needs to be units to help young adults deepen thinking about faith, its dimensions and its expression. It should also assist in promoting multi-cultural youth ministry. It may be that completing a sufficient number of such units would enable recognition at Certificate level. Such courses would assist in recognising the unique nature and contribution that youth ministry makes to ministry as a whole.

9. That the Diocese look at developing 'career paths' in youth ministry through the ways in which people are selected, trained and accredited for it, recognising youth ministry as a specific type of ministry with its own particular challenges.

10. That the Diocese explores how youth ministry might be established in those churches which currently have none. As recent research based on the NCLS has shown (Hughes 2014b), it is in the period of youth that most decisions of faith are made. Finding ways of developing youth ministry where, at present there is none, is one of the great needs of the church in general and of the Anglican Church in particular.

11. That the Diocese continue to work with other Christian denominations as we seek to understand the dynamics of youth ministry and how we can best point Australian youth to a better future in tune with God. This research project is part of a larger research agenda which is continuing with several denominations. Similar challenges exist in churches of all denominations across Australia, as all have been losing more young people from their ranks than are coming into the churches through conversion or in the exploration of faith. Further research in understanding the culture of young people and how youth ministry in Australia best operates is continuing, and the need to find ways of effectively engaging youth with the challenge of the Christian faith remains a high priority in all denominations.

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