

Borgman, D. (2006). "Ten stages in the development and organization of youth ministry." S. Hamilton, MA Center for Youth Studies

The "Ten Stages" are neither a theology nor a model of youth ministry. They are rather part of our philosophy of youth ministry. They are principles for planning, developing, and evaluating any youth ministry. They are particularly critical for developing a new out-reach ministry. But with that admission, it must be noted that failure of any of the Ten Stages points to weaknesses in any established youth ministry. If we want a youth ministry that is relevant and professionally excellent, holistic and dynamic, all ten stages must be used in evaluation and planning.

Cross-culturally around the world this paradigm for developing and evaluating youth ministry has been taught and discussed. Its basic assumptions are that youth ministry involves a special (non-child and non-adult) age group and subculture, that youth ministry involves outreach to outsiders who must be reached missiologically, that youth ministry must be relational, and that youth must be empowered to withstand social exploitation or oppression and to play a significant role in church and society. Most important assumptions are the affirmed calling of a youth leader and that all of the following stages will flow from prayer and out of the worship of the church. Note how the roles of social workers-missionary or evangelist-and pastor work out in this outline of youth ministry.

An outline of this natural progression in youth ministry is presented followed by further explanation.

I. Building a Support Base. (most important, most neglected step)

- A. Mandate and support from Senior Pastor or organizational director.
- B. Committee or board of concerned adults.
- C. Leadership team of volunteers and youth.

II. Research. (needs + resources = goals)

- A. Community research. (understanding the context for ministry)
- B. Topical research. (understanding the issues of ministry)
- C. Evaluation of present program (measuring the success of our goals)

III. Networking and Collaboration.

- A. Initial contacts with those doing similar youth work
- B. Broader network
- C. Collaboration: on the basis of systems thinking and holistic ministry

IV. Contact work. (fundamental, incarnational style of youth ministry)

- A. Moving from church or program into the youth culture and turf.
- B. Hanging out in order to become a friend.
- C. Growth-promoting conversations in the style of the Four Basic Questions. (discussed in

related article review)

V. Activities and Trips. (patterned after principles of experiential education)

- A. Responding to interests and needs.
- B. Moving from friendship to leadership.
- C. All promote growth of individuals and bonding of group or community.

VI. Counseling, Referral, Case Management, and Training.

- A. Responding to problems of at-risk youth and empowerment needs.
- B. Relationships and time lead young people to express their troubles and needs.
- C. Counseling on the run and life-management.

VII. Proclamation of the Good News. (What in the world is good news to kids these days?)

- A. The whole ministry (all previous stages) has been a living out of the Gospel.
- B. In this holistic paradigm, there has been an "earning the right to be heard."
- C. Young people want to hear clear answers and stories from those they trust. They need to hear the whole story from beginning to end.

VIII. Nurturing Young Faith. (deep roots for life in a confusing world)

- A. From preaching to teaching; stories heard to discoveries made.
- B. Teaching young people to teach and lead others.
- C. Preparing young people for life in a post-modern world.

IX. Service Learning. (peer leadership and service projects)

- A. A continuation of what has begun in V and VI above.
- B. Offered to young leaders regardless of faith commitment.
- C. Service brings significance especially when it is celebrated in worship.

X. Management of Growing Youth Program.

- A. Success of nine stages above leads to a growing program that demands management.
- B. Leadership must move toward management.
- C. Recruitment, training, delegation, supervision, fund raising, planning, control, and evaluation are key issues.

Now most churches hire a youth minister or pastor to do # 5-8 or 5-9. Para-church organizations may begin with Stage 4 and neglect Stages 2-3. There is a rationale to the outline above that should be understood.

The Bible has a lot to say about foundations... the foundation of the heavens, of the world and the church... as well as literal foundations of buildings. The foundation of youth ministry is a faith community (Stage 1). And

outreach demands a sending community. Continuity and maturity of youth ministry demands, not only the active commitment and support of a senior pastor, but the prayers, ideas and contacts of an adult committee. Most difficult problems in any youth ministry are avoided or worked out if pastor (or regional director), committee and leadership team are working together.

This foundation, a youth leader's support base, should take ownership of research (Stage 2); it should be no one person's project. Businesses do a lot better at market research than do the church and Christian ministries. Just as Moses' spies studied the Promised Land, we ought to know the context, the key needs, resources, contacts, etc. of our target area. Then, we should study our target population—its interests, needs and problems, hopes, fears and dreams— and ask, what is missing in their lives? Finally, we should have some way to measure our success year by year.

Stage 1 attempts to protect a youth leader from being a lone ranger. Positively, it tries to bring many counselors (Proverbs 11:14) and strong support around youth workers. Support, however, is needed from outside any particular church or organization from the rest of the community. Beyond, this youth work should be contributing to the health of the community and recognizing that young people are growing up among many social systems. Networking and collaboration, as Stage 3, has been added to what was once described as nine stages. Support and shared perspectives are needed by every youth minister. Social dysfunction is often a result of a failure of collaboration. The complexity of the youth culture and crises demands collaboration.

Market researchers, who know more about youth and their culture than anyone else these days, also spend time with young people on the streets and in malls, at school and in focus groups, even in their bedrooms to get to know them and get their opinions on their own turf. We become friends with young people when we enter their world with interest and encouragement (Stage 4). Successful youth leaders know the critical importance of seeing students outside their church or program—in various settings of their often stressful lives.

Youth leaders grow from friends to leaders as we sponsor trips and activities (Stage 5). We should introduce learning situations into these activities. Principles of reflection and processing are taught and practiced. We move from "What?" to "So What?" and "What next?" Through experiences that are both fun and challenging, we learn about ourselves, about others, our relationships and groups. We get to know each other and bond as we handle difficult situations. Critical issues of adolescence are worked out in group experiences. Let no one dismiss the "fun and games" of youth work if these are used to their full potential.

I recently took a mission trip with 40 carefully selected Christian leaders who are rising seniors in their high schools. One outstanding young leader in this group sent three of us a letter of high praise and thanks, of personal victories, and what I thought was a cry for help. I sent him back a long Email expressing what I seemed to be hearing. Within hours he responded to my invitation to call me. Again, he spoke of amazing things God was doing in his life. But he seemed to need a call back to discuss both the ordinariness of life and a deeper question about how he was really doing. Soon deeper issues poured out. Activities and our careful observations often open up issues that teenagers otherwise keep bottled up. Youth ministers need to be trained and attentive.

Games, trips and activities, including service projects, camps and retreats of Stage 5 lead to opportunities for counseling and the occasional need for referral of Stage 6. Someone on the leadership team should have some skills and training here. And the resource of a social worker or professional counselor should be on the adult committee or just beyond within easy reach. Youth leaders, not trained as professional counselors, still provide the critical functions of relational rapport, active listening, informal advice, and a bridge—when necessary—to professional counseling. We also find ourselves involved in case management, the rearrangement of the different aspects of a young person's life in such a way that provides relief, a chance to heal, and opportunity to grow. More and more youth ministry must include a therapeutic function.

Stages 4 through 6 give youth ministers the "right to be heard." They earn deep respect which creates receptivity to God's story. Young people who have heard friends their own age tell their stories find courage to tell their own true stories. This process provides open hearts for the great story of God's love. Stage 6 is the telling of that story, the proclamation of the Gospel or Good News. The Gospel has been lived out in previous stages; now it is fully explained. And it is to be told from beginning (Creation) to end (Eschatology or the end of

the story). Its focus is the Person of Jesus Christ. Adolescent spirituality is Christocentric. The seed of the Gospel needs nurturing and faith commitments of teenagers must be carefully followed up. Stage 7 encourages our intentional nurturing of Christ's young disciples. Here it is so important to remember that the primary task of youth is to work out their identities. The main problem with this in today's world is that they have been rushed toward pseudomaturity and are compartmentalized... Elkind describes them as "patchwork selves." Our emphasis, then, through discussions and sharing, our use of music and video clips from secular culture, through service projects and mission trips, is all toward integration and maturity. We must also remember that many of our solid young people, even those who have grown up in "healthy, Christian homes," harbor deep wounds from a variety of previous experiences. This brings us back to Stage 5; the Ten Stages have a progressive logic, but are not lock-stepped or fixed in concrete. Worship is a place to publicly lament the stage of the world and our lives, and even more to celebrate healing, commitment, growth, rites of passage, and service and mission projects.

Stage 9 might seem redundant (to Stage 5) to some keen minds. But it takes into consideration what many miss. There are many who will not come to faith commitment as teenagers. Youth ministers are not only asked to nurture those with a clear faith commitment, but to help all young people grow toward maturity. All can be trained as leaders to serve. This stage describes the importance of service learning and service projects (including school research projects) for all—whether they have made a faith-commitment or not. It calls for specific skills in experiential education and service learning.

Stage 10 completes these steps or emphases of youth ministries and points us back to Stage 1 in cyclic progression. Youth workers are not all good organizers, administrators, or managers. Where they are weak, they need to enlist help.

A youth program that has carefully followed all of the above will probably be growing—and its need for proper management will increase. Basic to good management is clarity about vision and strategy. These need to be articulated with passion and clarity by the leader and must be understood by all. Stage 9 calls for clear written vision and strategy.

The logic and progression of these ten stages have not considered your particular theology, philosophy and style of youth ministry. You need vision and strategy, a clear purpose statement, goals and intentional activities to develop greater capacities and growth in students and staff.

All ministry should flow from a vision or purpose statement. Adult committee and leadership team (Stage 1) should spend some time developing their purpose statement in a clear sentence. This should be expanded into a mission (or strategy) statement that tells where you want to go. A further strategy statement should tell how you want to get there.

The purpose statement should express the uniqueness of a program, its distinction, at least geographically, from all others. The purpose statement should also be an umbrella to cover all goals of the program. Doug Fields (Purpose Driven Youth Ministry) in his widely popular book and workshops, drives home the importance of a clear purpose statement. With others he bases any purpose statement on the five biblical functions of a church (evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, service, and worship). Church youth groups should include all five. Paraprochial mission organizations may be restricted to the first four—with strong emphasis on the first.

Goals are clear statements of expected results. Good goals are desirable, realistic, and measurable. Functions are the activities and things you do to accomplish your goals. From time to time functions should be evaluated to see how well they are accomplishing which goals.

If this is taken seriously it is quite evident that leadership teams and staff need some times of retreat to reflect on all this and evaluate where they are. Such times are also protection against burnout.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. How does the above correspond to the model of your youth program?

2. Do you see how the ten stages can be used for developing a brand new work or evaluating an ongoing program? Do you see how they can be used in training new staff or volunteers?
3. Most calls for help revolve around weaknesses in the first three (and especially the first) stages above. Do you see why Stage 1 should come before Stage 2? And 1 and 2 before 4?
4. Most churches expect you to begin with 5 and work almost exclusively on 5-7 or 8. Is your heart in all of the ten stages? How can you negotiate this with the church or program you are with?
6. Why is knowledge of the above ten stages important for job interviews?

IMPLICATIONS

Youth workers must be creative visionaries. And vision must be expressed in a way that is practical and realistic. The above has been developed with urban, suburban, and rural youth work in all countries and cultures in mind.

In many situations today there is dramatic tension between those who work with young people and adults, between youth leaders, on the one hand, and pastors and parents on the other. This is especially so among some groups who have moved from traditional to urban, post-modern situations. The youth leader must be clear about his or her own vision first and then negotiate it with the elders. Youth ministry involves working with young people, on one hand, and educating adult structures (being advocates) on the other.

The above strategic outline and principles allow you to fit most paradigms or models of youth ministry within it. If you cannot see how this is possible or you find yourself fighting the steps or frustrated by tensions between it and your present situation, you may want to get in touch with The Center for Youth Studies.

Dean Borgman cCYS